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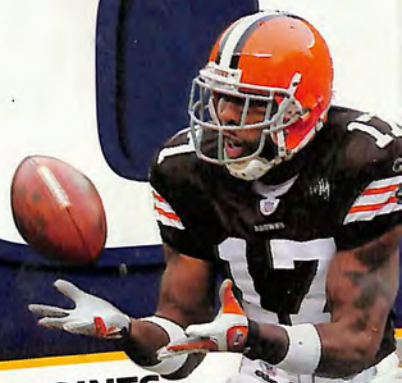

THE LAST ASSASSIN

Is Rodney Harrison the last safety to use fear as his ultimate weapon?

› PG. 14

BROWNIE POINTS

Braylon Edwards looks to top last year's 16-touchdown season in Cleveland

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DEAR READERS:

America's leading sports annuals—*Street & Smith's* and *Sporting News*—have become one.

American City Business Journals Inc., *Street & Smith's* parent company, purchased Sporting News late last year.

We have adopted the *Sporting News* flag for the annuals because Sporting News is an integrated sports media company whose operations also include the "first newsweekly in sports," a Web-based fantasy division and a nationwide radio network.

The "new" yearbooks will be a blend of the best of *Street & Smith's*, America's oldest sports annuals, and *Sporting News* yearbooks.

Sporting News annuals will be published in Charlotte, N.C., headquarters of American City and the Street & Smith's Sports Group.

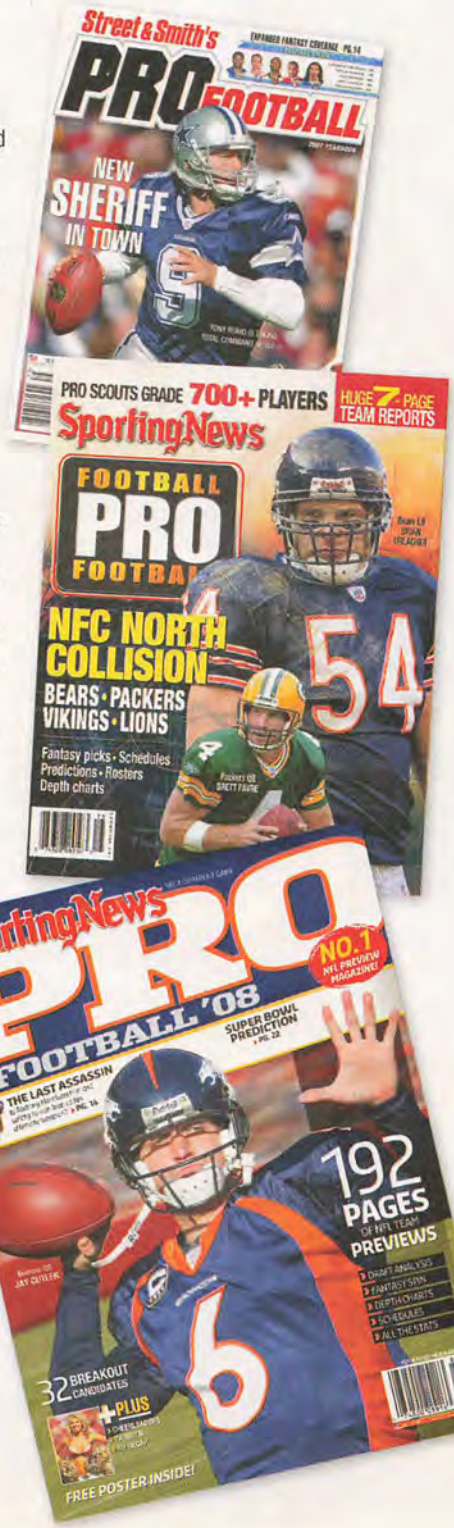
Titles will continue to include previews and predictions for baseball, hockey, pro and college football, pro and college basketball, fantasy baseball and football, and four NASCAR publications.

We believe the combined resources of *Street & Smith's* and *Sporting News* will create a new standard for excellence in sports yearbooks.

Should you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact us at annuals@sportingnews.com or annuals@streetandsmiths.com. We'd love to hear from you.

Sincerely,
SPORTING NEWS YEARBOOKS

Mike Kallay
Publisher



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2008 PRO FOOTBALL YEARBOOK June 2008

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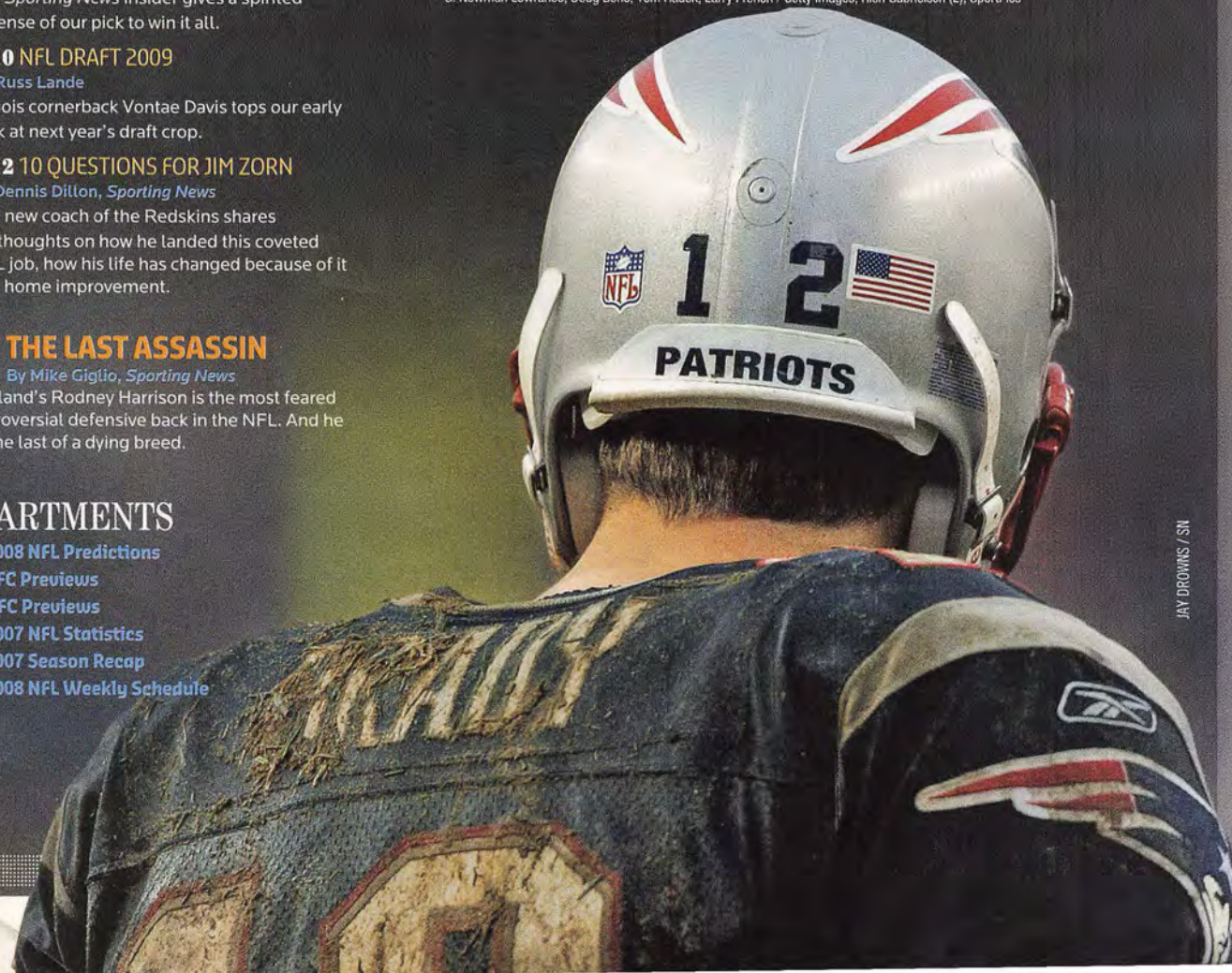

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RATED	PLAY					RESULT
66%	The NFL Pre-Season, including my **Pre-Season Game of the Year**					
	9/18	Lions +2½	23	Browns	20	W
65%	All My **Best Bet Club College Plays** for the Entire Season					
68%	All My **Best Bet Club NFL Plays** for the Entire Season					
67%	The first three **College Football Las Vegas Steam Games of the Season**					
72%	The First 3 **NFL Las Vegas Steam Games of the Season**					
80%	My **50-Unit Rated College Kickoff Crusher**					
	9/1	Georgia Tech +1½33		Notre Dame	3	W
86%	My **50 Unit Rated College Football Rivalry Game of the Year.**					
	9/15	Kentucky +5½	40	Louisville	34	W
78%	My **50-Unit AFC Game of the Year**					
	9/16	Steelers -10	26	Bills	3	W
79%	My **50-Unit NFC Game of the Year**					
	9/30	Cowboys -13	35	Rams	7	W
97%	My **100-Unit Chairman's Club NFL Game of the Year**					
	11/4	Lions -3	44	Broncos	7	W
95%	My **100-Unit College Shocker of the Year**					
	11/10	Nebraska +7½	73	Kansas State	31	W

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More about Kelso Sturgeon:

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* Seen on **TV's ProLine** (USA Cable Network) and host of Las Vegas radio show ***"The Winner's Roundtable"***
* Profiled in: ***Wall Street Journal, NY Times, Chicago Tribune, Washington Post and Playboy.***

TARGETS

HOW TODAY'S PLAYERS STACK UP TO THE ALL-TIME GREATS

*ACTIVE PLAYERS FROM 2007 IN CAPS
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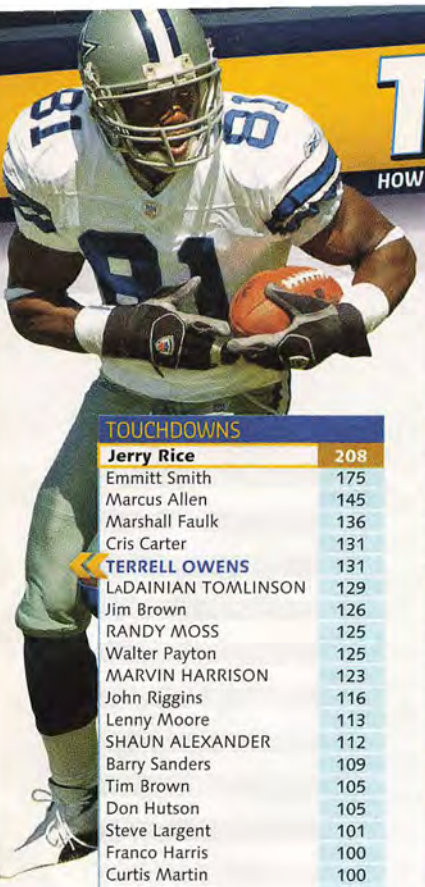

TOUCHDOWNS

Jerry Rice	208
Emmitt Smith	175
Marcus Allen	145
Marshall Faulk	136
Cris Carter	131
TERRELL OWENS	131
LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON	129
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Walter Payton	125
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John Riggins	116
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Tim Brown	105
Don Hutson	105
Steve Largent	101
Franco Harris	100
Curtis Martin	100
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Art Powell	82
Terry Allen	79
James Brooks	79
Harold Carmichael	79
Eddie George	78
Frank Gifford	78

TOUCHDOWN PASSES

BRETT FAVRE	442
Dan Marino	420
Fran Tarkenton	342
PEYTON MANNING	306
John Elway	300
Warren Moon	291
Johnny Unitas	290
VINNY TESTAVERDE	275
Joe Montana	273
Dave Krieg	261
Sonny Jurgensen	255
Dan Fouts	254
Drew Bledsoe	251
Boomer Esiason	247
John Hadl	244
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Jim Kelly	237
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Chris Chandler	170
Charley Johnson	170

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MORTEN ANDERSEN	2,544
Gary Anderson	2,434
George Blanda	2,002
MATT STOVER	1,822
JOHN CARNEY	1,812
JASON ELAM	1,786
Norm Johnson	1,736
Nick Lowery	1,711
Jan Stenerud	1,699
JASON HANSON	1,659
Eddie Murray	1,594
Al Del Greco	1,584
JOHN KASAY	1,504
Steve Christie	1,476
Pat Leahy	1,470
Jim Turner	1,439
Matt Bahr	1,422
JEFF WILKINS	1,416
ADAM VINATIERI	1,389
Mark Moseley	1,382
Jim Bakken	1,380
Fred Cox	1,365
Lou Groza	1,349
Jerry Rice	1,256
Jim Breech	1,246

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RYAN LONGWELL	1,243
Pete Stoyanovich	1,236
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Ray Wersching	1,122
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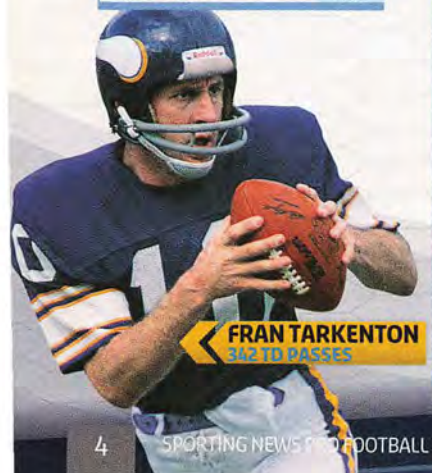
Don Cockroft	1,080
Garo Yepremian	1,074
Mike Vanderjagt	1,067
Emmitt Smith	1,052
Todd Peterson	1,043
Bruce Gossett	1,031
Jeff Jaeger	1,008
Sam Baker	977
Greg Davis	962
Rafael Septien	960
Lou Michaels	955
Chris Jacke	944
Fuad Reveiz	931
Doug Brien	915
Chip Lohmiller	913
Roy Gerela	903
DAVID AKERS	899
John Hall	889

PASSING YARDAGE

BRETT FAVRE	61,655
Dan Marino	61,361
John Elway	51,475
Warren Moon	49,325
Fran Tarkenton	47,003
VINNY TESTAVERDE	46,233
Drew Bledsoe	44,611
Dan Fouts	43,040
PEYTON MANNING	41,626
Joe Montana	40,551
Johnny Unitas	40,239
Dave Krieg	38,147
Boomer Esiason	37,920
Jim Kelly	35,467
Jim Everett	34,837
KERRY COLLINS	34,717
Jim Hart	34,665
Steve DeBerg	34,241
John Hadl	33,503
Phil Simms	33,462
Steve Young	33,124
Troy Aikman	32,942
Ken Anderson	32,838
Sonny Jurgensen	32,224
Mark Brunell	31,826
John Brodie	31,548
STEVE McNAIR	31,304
Norm Snead	30,797
Randall Cunningham	29,979
Joe Ferguson	29,817
Roman Gabriel	29,444
Jake Plummer	29,253
Rich Gannon	28,743
Len Dawson	28,711
BRAD JOHNSON	28,627
Chris Chandler	28,484
Y.A. Tittle	28,339
Ron Jaworski	28,190
Terry Bradshaw	27,989
TRENT GREEN	27,950
Ken Stabler	27,938
Craig Morton	27,908
Joe Namath	27,663
Jeff George	27,602
George Blanda	26,920
Steve Grogan	26,886
Bobby Layne	26,768
JON KITNA	26,535
TOM BRADY	26,370
Jim Harbaugh	26,288

PASS COMPLETIONS

BRETT FAVRE	5,377
Dan Marino	4,967
John Elway	4,123
Warren Moon	3,988
Drew Bledsoe	3,839
VINNY TESTAVERDE	3,787
Fran Tarkenton	3,686
PEYTON MANNING	3,468
Joe Montana	3,409
Dan Fouts	3,297
Dave Krieg	3,105
Boomer Esiason	2,969
KERRY COLLINS	2,918
Troy Aikman	2,898
Steve DeBerg	2,874
Jim Kelly	2,874
Jim Everett	2,841
Johnny Unitas	2,830
Mark Brunell	2,738
STEVE McNAIR	2,733
Steve Young	2,667
Ken Anderson	2,654
BRAD JOHNSON	2,627
Jim Hart	2,593
Phil Simms	2,576
Rich Gannon	2,533
Jake Plummer	2,484
John Brodie	2,469
Sonny Jurgensen	2,433
Randall Cunningham	2,429
JON KITNA	2,394
Joe Ferguson	2,369
Roman Gabriel	2,366
John Hadl	2,363
Chris Chandler	2,328
Jim Harbaugh	2,305
Jeff George	2,298
TOM BRADY	2,294
Norm Snead	2,276
Ken Stabler	2,270
TRENT GREEN	2,228
DONOVAN McNABB	2,189
Ron Jaworski	2,187
Len Dawson	2,136
Y.A. Tittle	2,118
Ken O'Brien	2,110
Craig Morton	2,053
Joe Theismann	2,044
Terry Bradshaw	2,025
JEFF GARCIA	2,020



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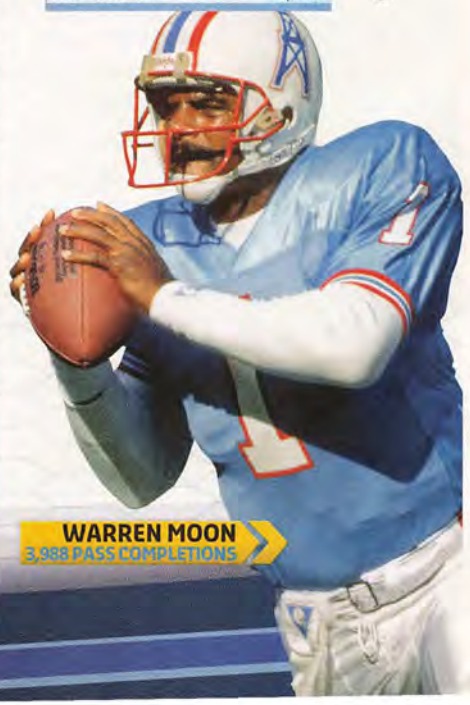
342 TD PASSES



WARREN MOON
3,988 PASS COMPLETIONS

CLOCKWISE: DAVID DUROCHIK / SPORTPICS; US PRESSWIRE; MALCOLM EMMONS

TIM BROWN
14,934 RECEIVING YARDS

RUSHING YARDAGE

Emmitt Smith	**18,355**
Walter Payton	16,726
Barry Sanders	15,269
Curtis Martin	14,101
Jerome Bettis	13,662
Eric Dickerson	13,259
Tony Dorsett	12,739
Jim Brown	12,312
Marshall Faulk	12,279
Marcus Allen	12,243
Franco Harris	12,120
Thurman Thomas	12,074
EDGERRIN JAMES	11,607
John Riggins	11,352
Corey Dillon	11,241
O.J. Simpson	11,236
FRED TAYLOR	10,715
LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON	10,650
Ricky Watters	10,643
Tiki Barber	10,449
Eddie George	10,441
Ottis Anderson	10,273
WARRICK DUNN	10,181
SHAUN ALEXANDER	9,429
Earl Campbell	9,407
JAMAL LEWIS	9,105
AHMAN GREEN	8,751
Terry Allen	8,614
Jim Taylor	8,597
Joe Perry	8,378
Earnest Byner	8,261
Herschel Walker	8,225
Roger Craig	8,189
Gerald Riggs	8,188
PRIEST HOLMES	8,172
Larry Csonka	8,081
Freeman McNeil	8,074
Stephen Davis	8,052
Garrison Hearst	7,966
James Brooks	7,962
CLINTON PORTIS	7,715
Chris Warren	7,696
Terrell Davis	7,607
Mike Pruitt	7,378
Leroy Kelly	7,274
George Rogers	7,176
RICKY WILLIAMS	7,112
Charlie Garner	7,097
Rodney Hampton	6,897
Antowain Smith	6,881

RECEPTIONS

Jerry Rice	**1,549**
Cris Carter	1,101
Tim Brown	1,094
MARVIN HARRISON	1,042
Andre Reed	951
ISAAC BRUCE	942
Art Monk	940
KEENAN McCARDELL	883
TERRELL OWENS	882
Jimmy Smith	862
Irving Fryar	851
Rod Smith	849
Larry Centers	827
TONY GONZALEZ	820
Steve Largent	819
Shannon Sharpe	815
Henry Ellard	814
Keyshawn Johnson	814
TORRY HOLT	805
RANDY MOSS	774
Marshall Faulk	767
James Lofton	764
ERIC MOULDS	764
Michael Irvin	750
Charlie Joiner	750

RECEPTIONS (cont.)

Andre Rison	743
MUHSIN MUHAMMAD	742
HINES WARD	719
DERRICK MASON	710
Gary Clark	699
Terance Mathis	689
Herman Moore	670
JOEY GALLOWAY	669
Ricky Proehl	669
Ozzie Newsome	662
Charley Taylor	649
Drew Hill	634
Don Maynard	633
Raymond Berry	631
Rob Moore	628
Johnnie Morton	624
AMANI TOOMER	620
Keith Byars	610
JOE HORN	603
BOBBY ENGRAM	598
Anthony Miller	595
Sterling Sharpe	595
Curtis Conway	594
TERRY GLENN	593
Tony Martin	593

RECEIVING YARDS

Jerry Rice	**22,895**
Tim Brown	14,934
ISAAC BRUCE	14,109
James Lofton	14,004
MARVIN HARRISON	13,944
Cris Carter	13,899
Henry Ellard	13,777
Andre Reed	13,198
Steve Largent	13,089
TERRELL OWENS	13,070
Irving Fryar	12,785
Art Monk	12,721
Jimmy Smith	12,287
RANDY MOSS	12,193
Charlie Joiner	12,146
Michael Irvin	11,904
TORRY HOLT	11,864
Don Maynard	11,834
Rod Smith	11,389
KEENAN McCARDELL	11,373
Gary Clark	10,856
Stanley Morgan	10,716
JOEY GALLOWAY	10,572
Keyshawn Johnson	10,571
Harold Jackson	10,372
Lance Alworth	10,266
Andre Rison	10,205
Shannon Sharpe	10,060
ERIC MOULDS	9,995
MUHSIN MUHAMMAD	9,934
TONY GONZALEZ	9,882
Drew Hill	9,831
Rob Moore	9,368
Raymond Berry	9,275
Herman Moore	9,174
Anthony Miller	9,148
Charley Taylor	9,110
Tony Martin	9,065
DERRICK MASON	9,024
Harold Carmichael	8,985
Fred Biletnikoff	8,974
Mark Clayton	8,974
Wes Chandler	8,966
Roy Green	8,965
AMANI TOOMER	8,917
Ricky Proehl	8,878
Mark Duper	8,869
TERRY GLENN	8,823
Terance Mathis	8,809
Mark Carrier	8,763

INTERCEPTIONS

Paul Krause	**81**
Emlen Tunnell	79
Rod Woodson	71
Dick "Night Train" Lane	68
Ken Riley	65
Ronnie Lott	63
Dave Brown	62
Dick LeBeau	62
Emmitt Thomas	58
Mel Blount	57
Bobby Boyd	57
Eugene Robinson	57
Johnny Robinson	57
Everson Walls	57
Lem Barney	56
Pat Fischer	56
Aeneas Williams	55
Eric Allen	54
Willie Brown	54
Darrell Green	54
Deion Sanders	53
DARREN SHARPER	53
Jack Butler	52
Bobby Dillon	52
TY LAW	52
Jimmy Patton	52
Mel Renfro	52
Larry Wilson	52
Bobby Bryant	51
Donnie Shell	51
Terrell Buckley	50
Don Burroughs	50
Deron Cherry	50
John Harris	50
Yale Lary	50
Ken Houston	49
Jake Scott	49
Herb Adderley	48
Dave Grayson	48
Richie Petitbon	48
Dave Waymer	48
Willie Wood	48
Ray Buchanan	47
Jim Johnson	47
Lemar Parrish	47
Troy Vincent	47
Jack Christiansen	46
Austin "Goose" Gonsoulin	46
Mike Haynes	46
Ed Meador	46
Dave Whitsell	46

SACKS

Bruce Smith	**200.0**
Reggie White	198.0
Kevin Greene	160.0
Chris Doleman	150.5
MICHAEL STRAHAN	141.5
Richard Dent	137.5
John Randle	137.5

SACKS (cont.)

Leslie O'Neal	132.5
Lawrence Taylor	132.5
Rickey Jackson	128.0
Derrick Thomas	126.5
SIMEON RICE	122.0
Clyde Simmons	121.5
JASON TAYLOR	117.0
Sean Jones	113.0
Greg Townsend	109.5
Pat Swilling	107.5
Trace Armstrong	106.0
Neil Smith	104.5
Jim Jeffcoat	102.5
KEVIN CARTER	100.5
William Fuller	100.5
Charles Haley	100.5
Andre Tippett	100.0
Simon Fletcher	97.5
Jacob Green	97.5
Dexter Manley	97.5
WARREN SAPP	96.5
Robert Porcher	95.5
Steve McMichael	95.0
Henry Thomas	93.5
BRYANT YOUNG	89.5
Ken Harvey	89.0
WILLIE McGINEST	85.0
Howie Long	84.0
Leonard Marshall	83.5
LA'ROI GLOVER	83.0
Charles Mann	83.0
Wayne Martin	82.5
Lee Williams	82.5
Tim Harris	81.0
Hugh Douglas	80.0
Jason Gildon	80.0
CHAD BROWN	79.0
Karl Mecklenburg	79.0
TREVOR PRYCE	79.0
Ray Childress	76.5
LEONARD LITTLE	75.0
Bryce Paup	75.0
Mark Gastineau	74.0
KABEER GBAJA-BIAMILA	74.0

TOP TO BOTTOM: DILIP VISHWANAT / ICON SMI; EVAN PINKUS / GETTY IMAGES

Not Favre from their thoughts

Packer fans will learn that life goes on without their legendary gunslinger, because the product on the field is still the best in the division.

Really, it will be OK, Packer fans. You will survive without Brett Favre. And so will the Packers.

Favre's retirement was the offseason's biggest story, but it says here the Packers are still the team to beat in the NFC North. The Packers were 13-3 last season, and it wasn't just because they had No. 4. They have a solid defense. They have an excellent coach in Mike McCarthy. And their general manager, Ted Thompson, shrewdly planned for Favre's inevitable departure.

Longtime Packer backers have endured trauma like this before. A host of Green Bay legends has retired through the years, greats like Bart Starr, Willie Davis, Ray Nitschke and Vince Lombardi. The NFL went on, and so did the Packers.

Thompson is a smart guy. That's why he was *Sporting News* NFL Executive of the Year last season. One of the smartest things Thompson did was draft Aaron Rodgers in 2005. The Packers didn't need a quarterback then. But they do now. And Thompson's foresight in drafting the former Cal star gave the young quarterback time to grow in Green Bay before being thrust into the starter's role.

We're about to see if Rodgers is ready. But he won't have to carry the offense. Running back Ryan Grant emerged as an elite weapon last season. The team is loaded at wide receiver, with Donald Driver, Greg Jennings and James Jones, while Donald Lee proved to be a dependable tight end.

Defensively, the Packers have playmakers like cornerbacks Al Harris and Charles Woodson, linebackers A.J. Hawk and Nick Barnett and defensive ends Aaron Kampman and Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila.

That's still the deepest nucleus in the division. With Favre out of the picture, picking another team to win the NFC North will become trendy. A lot of people like the Vikings. How can you not like Adrian Peterson?

But looking around the NFC North, it is difficult to find another team as complete as the Packers. Peterson can run, but the Vikings can't throw. As long as the Bears rely on Rex Grossman, their offense will be unreliable. The Lions, you ask? Until they prove otherwise, they're still the Lions.

The adulation people have for Favre is understandable. He is one-of-a-kind. Not only did he play brilliantly, you could depend on him. The guy never missed games. If you watched the Packers play, you saw Favre. It was automatic. You can't depend on the price of gas. You can't depend on the weather. But you could always depend on Favre. How cool was that? He was one of life's comforts.

That security blanket is gone in Green Bay, but Thompson and McCarthy did not tie their fates to Favre. They have built a balanced team, one that won with Favre, and one that can win without him. The Packers will be motivated to prove that they're still Super Bowl contenders. You saw what happened with the Giants last season after Tiki Barber retired.

We're not suggesting the Packers should shop for Super Bowl rings. But the power in the NFC North has not shifted just because Favre hit the road. The road to the division title still goes through Green Bay.

—Clifton Brown

Tuck-and-run

Look for the well-chronicled NFL copycats to borrow generously from the Giants' pass-rushing schemes that were so successful against New England in the Super Bowl.

The Giants' D-line rocked in Super Bowl 42. It so overwhelmed New England that a case could have been made for that unit winning the MVP award.

"I don't want to diminish what Eli Manning did," says Lions defensive coordinator Joe Barry, "but those four guys took over that game. They were unbelievable."

The Giants tormented Tom Brady & Co. They sacked the Patriots' quarterback five times, knocked him down on several other plays and stymied a New England offense that had set a single-season record for points.

They did it with a furious pass rush generated primarily by their front four, which was comprised, at various times, of Michael Strahan, Osi Umenyiora, Fred Robbins, Barry Cofield, Jay Alford and Justin Tuck. An end who often lined up at tackle in the Giants' line rotation last season, Tuck played a unique role.

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"He's one of those guys who's strong enough to play inside, and tall enough and quick enough to play on the outside," Eagles center Jamaal Jackson says. "With a guy who has that quickness, strength and athletic ability, you have a lot of tricks to play with."

Tuck, who accounted for 10 of the Giants' league-leading 53 sacks during the regular season and two of their five in the Super Bowl, could have as much influence on the upcoming season as any NFL player.

You've heard of the tuck rule. Well, get ready for the Tuck Factor.

NFL teams are notorious copycats. They especially like to borrow a successful strategy from the Super Bowl team and try to work it into their playbooks. And one tactic 4-3 defenses will try to emulate in 2008 is using three ends to try and sack the quarterback.

You've heard of the tuck rule. Well, get ready for the Tuck Factor.

A premier pass rush has never been more important in the NFL. Last season, teams attempted a combined 17,045 passes—the most since 2002, when the Texans entered the league as the 32nd team.

Offenses can find ways to slow down even the best pass-rushing ends. They can chip them using a tackle and a back, or a tackle and a tight end. So, if you have two slugs inside who are incapable of rushing the passer, the quarterback is going to stand comfortably in the pocket and have time to find an open receiver.

But if you have a third end inside who's quick enough to mount a pass rush yet stout enough to stop the run—a Justin Tuck type—it can create mismatch problems for an offensive line.

"If you can find a way to get your fastest, most explosive, best pass rushers on the field—even if you might have an undersized guy playing tackle who can hold up against the run—man, it's going to pay dividends for you if it's a pass," Barry says.

The Giants weren't the only 4-3 defense that tried to amp up its rush by putting a third end inside in passing situations. The Packers moved Cullen Jenkins, an end in their base defense, to tackle and brought in pass-rush specialist Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila. The Panthers tried it some with end Mike Rucker inside and Stanley McClover outside. And the Colts have done it on a full-time basis with Raheem Brock, an end during his first four years who has played tackle each of the last two seasons.

The Saints already had two good bookends in Will Smith and Charles Grant, yet they signed former Jaguars end Bobby McCray in free agency. New Orleans could use all three in some passing situations.

Look for more teams to try to copy the Giants' success. It's the way of the NFL.

—Dennis Dillon

More wins over Miami?

With Bill Parcells now in control, you can count on it.

No matter where he goes, Bill Parcells follows the same game plan. He surrounds himself with familiar faces. He builds through the draft. He starts with the offensive and defensive lines. And eventually, he wins.

Trying to turn the Dolphins into contenders may be the toughest job Parcells has ever undertaken. But Parcells and the Dolphins will eventually pull it off. They will not make the playoffs this season, but the talent has already been significantly upgraded since Parcells became executive vice president in December.

Forget another 1-15 season. Not on Parcells' watch. This writer believes the Fins will win five games. They will beat a few teams they have no business beating. And they will become an attractive future destination for free agents looking for a sunny climate and winning atmosphere.

Two Parcells guys are handling the daily operations: general manager Jeff Ireland and head coach Tony Sparano. Both believe in Parcells' philosophies. Both are tireless workers. Both recognize winning football players when they see them. Having a front office and coaching staff that works in concert is one of the keys to NFL success, and the Dolphins have that.

"This is basically a talent-acquisition business," Parcells says. "In addition to acquiring the talent, you have to have structure in place within your organization that will enhance the development of that talent. Then you have to have a confident coaching staff that will coach that talent. I think if you can get those three things in place—solid personnel acquisition, good development and good coaching—I think you can make progress in this league. Not everyone has that."

The foundation for success is already being set. Jake Long was a smart No. 1 draft pick. Left tackle is the most important position on the offensive line, and Long is a potential All-Pro who should solidify that position into the next decade.

Drafting Long's University of Michigan teammate, quarterback Chad Henne, in the second round was also a good move. Nobody knows if John Beck can cut it as a starting NFL quarterback. Nobody knows if Henne can cut it either. But now the Dolphins have two young quarterbacks who are motivated to become the No. 1 guy. The competition will be good for both.

The Dolphins were aggressive during free agency, getting at least five players who should help them: guard Justin Smiley, wide receiver Ernest Wilford, cornerback Nathan Jones and defensive tackles Jason Ferguson and Randy Starks. This year's Dolphins would whip last year's Dolphins. There is simply more talent across the board, on both sides of the ball.

That said, crawling out of the basement of the AFC East will be hard work. The Patriots and Tom Brady are not going anywhere. The Jets have improved. So have the Bills. Without a proven quarterback, the Dolphins could still finish last, even with a better season. That will not sit well with Parcells. But he won't panic. Nor will he deviate from his long-term plan to make the Dolphins a consistent winner.

Lately, the Dolphins have not been fun to watch. That will change. This season, they will be spoilers. But Parcells is the right guy to help them become contenders.

—Clifton Brown

Parcells

JOEL AUERBACH / US PRESSWIRE

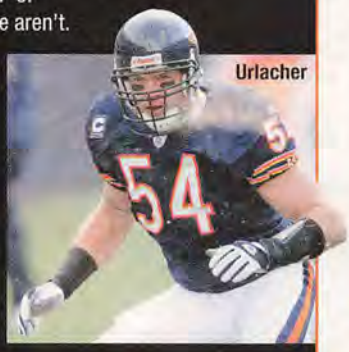
Bear-ly noticeable

Looking for a surprise team this NFL season? Show Chicago some Lovie.

Every year, at least one NFL team makes the playoffs unexpectedly. The Bears will be that team in 2008. Are you surprised? That's good. That means the Bears qualify as a surprise team.

Jump on the Bears' bandwagon now. Plenty of seats are available. People think the Bears were foolish to re-sign Rex Grossman. Cedric Benson is coming off an injury-plagued, disappointing season. Some of their key players on defense slumped in 2007, like Brian Urlacher and Lance Briggs. The Bears suffered from the dreaded post-Super Bowl hangover, and they paid for it, finishing 7-9.

People are sleeping on the Bears. We aren't. They are just one season removed from being NFC champions. Their defense is still talented. Their pride has been hurt. The Packers' legend at quarterback has retired. The Vikings still need a quarterback. The Lions have a quarterback, but he can't play defense, where they need the most help.


Urlacher

There is no reason why the Bears cannot return to playoff form, if Grossman does not self-destruct. Yes, that's a big "if," but the Bears will not ask Grossman to carry the offense. They just want him to manage it the way he did in '06. If Grossman can't, they will turn to Kyle Orton, and hope he can play well enough not to hurt them.

Jump on the Bears' bandwagon now. Plenty of seats are available.

The Bears did a nice job in the draft. First-round pick Chris Williams has the talent to be a superb offensive tackle, and Grossman's play may improve if more pass rushers are kept out of his face. Second-round running back Matt Forte should get considerable carries, making the Bears less dependent on Benson. Third-rounder Earl Bennett has a chance to play immediately at wide receiver, and watch out for fifth-round pick Zackary Bowman, who was one of the college football's most talented corners despite being plagued by injuries at Nebraska.

Most of the Bears took last year's demise personally. And nobody took it harder than coach Lovie Smith. Even in good times, Smith is a no-nonsense kind of guy. Coming off last season, expect Chicago's training camp to be more like boot camp. The Bears lost their edge last season, but Smith plans to sharpen it. Competition for playing time will be wide open. Smith knows that if the Bears have another down season, there will not be much love for Lovie in Chicago.

With Briggs, Urlacher and defensive tackle Tommie Harris, the Bears still have a solid defense. They also have a game-breaker in returner/wide receiver Devin Hester. But the season will hinge partly on whether the Bears get burned for general manager Jerry Angelo's decision not to draft a quarterback. Thirteen quarterbacks were taken in the draft, and the Bears didn't get one. However, none of the QBs the Bears were in position to take would have been ready to start this season.

The Bears have an interesting schedule, because they're the only team with three consecutive road games (Nov. 16, 23, 30) and the only club that plays its first two games on the road—at the Colts (Sept. 7) and Panthers (Sept. 14). But the rest of the schedule favors Chicago. While the Packers will win the NFC North, the Bears will squeeze out 10 wins, finish second in the division and take a wild-card spot. In 2007, the Packers were the surprise team in this division. This season, it's the Bears' turn.

—Clifton Brown

(L TO R): DAVID DUROCHIK FOR SN; TODD WARSHAW FOR SN

Why do we like the Chargers?

Let us count the ways ...

When last we saw the Chargers, quarterback Philip Rivers was playing with a torn ACL, tight end Antonio Gates was playing with a bum toe and running back LaDainian Tomlinson wasn't playing at all. A strained MCL forced L.T. to take a seat on the bench after two series in the AFC Championship Game against New England.

Tomlinson and Gates are red-zone weapons. So when San Diego moved to the Patriots' 8-, 5- and 6-yard lines during that game, it had to settle for field goals and eventually lost, 21-12.

Imagine what might have happened if Tomlinson, Gates and Rivers were able-bodied that day. Could San Diego have beaten the Patriots?

We think so. That's one reason *Sporting News* is picking the Chargers to win Super Bowl 43 in Tampa.

After years of falling short of expectations, the Chargers made a breakthrough last season when they won two playoff games (including a victory over the Colts in Indianapolis). Let us tell you while they're poised to win it all in 2008:

- Tomlinson is the league's best all-around running back. He won his second straight rushing title in 2007, he's a top-notch receiver and—if you don't pay attention—he'll knife you with a touchdown pass.
- Rivers is an ascending quarterback who is starting to maximize his skills. He performed superbly during the Chargers' eight-game winning streak going into the AFC championship game, and demonstrated leadership and courage by playing in that contest with a torn knee ligament.
- The arrival of Chris Chambers, acquired in a trade with Miami last October, and the development of Vincent Jackson give Rivers more receiving weapons and will make defenses think twice about trying to suffocate Gates.
- The Chargers were first in the NFL last season in takeaways and turnover margin. Cornerback Antonio Cromartie led the league with 10 interceptions, including three picks off of Peyton Manning during a regular-season game and another in the playoffs.
- San Diego has seven players who were voted to the Pro Bowl last season: Tomlinson, Gates, Cromartie, linebacker Shawne Merriman, defensive tackle Jamal Williams, guard Kris Dielman and special-teams star Kassim Osgood.
- The drafting of Arizona's Antoine Cason gives San Diego three cornerbacks who were first-round picks. The others are Cromartie (2006) and Quentin Jammer (2002).
- Norv Turner, who, in his previous stops in the NFL, had forged a reputation as a great offensive coordinator but a mediocre head coach, proved to be a guiding light in his first year at San Diego. He preached patience and perseverance—even after the Chargers lost three in a row early in the season—and the players eventually bought into his program.
- The Chargers have a bunch of players entering the prime of their NFL careers. Of the 53 players who finished last season on the active roster, 41 were in their fifth season or less.

Yes, the Chargers must overcome the loss of super-sub running back Michael Turner. They face a challenging schedule that includes non-divisional games against the Patriots, Colts and Steelers; four cross-country trips to the East Coast; and an overseas game in London. And they might have to open the regular season without Gates and center Nick Hardwick, who is recovering from a foot injury.

But there are many more reasons to like the 2008 Chargers. If you miss them during the regular season, you can catch them in Tampa come February.

—Dennis Dillon

A look ahead to 2009

Illini corner Davis tops next year's draft crop.

OK, so Jake and Chris Long haven't played a down of professional football yet. That's not going to stop us from giving you the early lowdown on who to look for at the top of the draft board next April. We'll be breaking down tons of film over the summer, but as we sit here today, here's a quick look at the top 10 prospects for next year's draft:

1 ○ Vontae Davis
CB, Illinois (6-0, 205)

Many would expect the younger brother of San Francisco 49ers tight end Vernon Davis to live in his shadow, but by this time next year NFL fans will be referring to Vernon as "Vontae's brother." Vontae, a junior this fall, has rare size, speed and athleticism. A number of NFL scouts told us that he would have been the No. 1 cornerback selected in the '08 draft had he been eligible and might have been selected in the top five overall. He is a rare athlete with excellent competitiveness and instincts, and consistently produces at the level of his talent.

2 ○ Brian Cushing
OLB, USC (6-4, 245)

Cushing has not received the media attention of fellow USC linebacker Rey Maualuga (No. 7 on this list), but is regarded as a better NFL prospect. Cushing has shown the versatility and athleticism to start at defensive end and outside linebacker in college. He is a smooth and fluid athlete and has the elite speed (4.55 seconds in the 40-yard dash) to chase down plays all over the field. Cushing is a major pass-rush weapon when playing defensive end. If his '08 season is as good as his junior campaign, Cushing could be the No. 1 overall pick.

3 ○ Malcolm Jenkins
CB, Ohio State (6-1, 210)

Jenkins almost entered the '08 draft and likely would have been a first-round pick. Returning for his senior season will enable him to round out his game and make a run at being the No. 1 cornerback drafted. He is tall and athletic but must do a better job of playing the ball instead of focusing on making the tackle after the catch. Jenkins' draft status may be hindered by the fact that Ohio State could have five or six players drafted in next year's first round. So scouts might knock Jenkins as overrated because of the elite talent surrounding him.

4 ○ Michael Oher
OT, Ole Miss (6-5, 320)

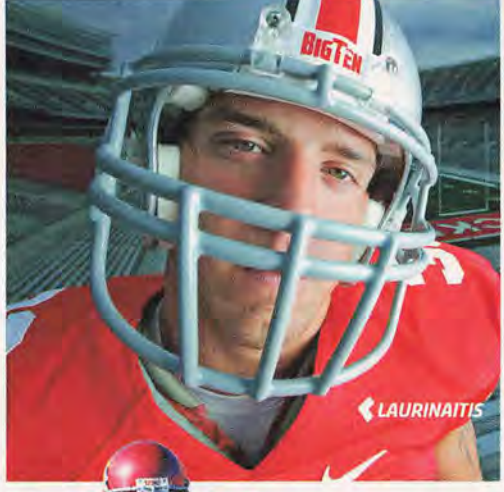
Oher made the correct decision by returning to school for his senior season. He is no doubt a premier athlete with rare footwork and athleticism. Oher was the subject of the Michael Lewis book, "The Blind Side: Evolution of a Game," which reported that he has learning problems. The book was the worst thing that could have happened to Oher's football career. He now has a big hurdle to overcome during pre-draft interviews. That said, Oher has the athletic ability, size, strength and competitive streak to become a franchise NFL left tackle.

5 ○ Brandon Pettigrew
TE, Oklahoma State (6-6, 260)

Pettigrew didn't enter the '08 draft after receiving some erroneous feedback saying he would've been a second-round pick. Most scouts who have evaluated him say he has always been a sure-fire first-rounder. Some go as far as saying he could be the best tight end to enter the NFL in a decade. Pettigrew is huge with natural hands, great athleticism and the deceptive speed to make plays after the catch. He ran into some off-field trouble in the spring and must prove that it was a one-time incident.

6 ○ André Smith
OT, Alabama (6-5, 340)

Smith, a rising junior, has fast become one of the best offensive linemen in college football. He has the size, strength, athleticism and competitiveness to be a high pick in the '09 draft. He must avoid falling prey to what plagues many big offensive linemen—eating themselves out of the first round—because few elite left tackles are 330-plus pounds. If he improves in '08 and shows up at the NFL Combine in good shape and under 340, Smith should be a high pick.



7 ○ Rey Maualuga
ILB, USC (6-3, 250)

Maualuga has been the center of attention since taking senior Oscar Lua's job as a sophomore and then blowing up ballcarriers all over the field. Maualuga is super strong with rare competitiveness and uncommon speed; he flies around the field with reckless abandon, delivering a ton of big hits. To be a top-10 pick, he must stay under control and tackle more consistently as well as ease NFL teams' concerns about some off-field issues.

8 ○ Duke Robinson
G, Oklahoma (6-5, 350)

Robinson shocked us when he did not enter the '08 draft, because he was widely viewed as the No. 1 guard prospect. He is huge and plays with rare aggressiveness, physically dominating defensive linemen once he gets hold of them. Weight is a big issue for offensive tackles, but it's not as big a deal for guards so long as they keep dominating defensive tackles.

9 ○ James Laurinaitis
ILB, Ohio State (6-3, 245)

Laurinaitis will be part of a large group of Ohio State players drafted in the first round next year. Unlike many prospects who receive a ton of publicity early in their college careers, Laurinaitis actually lives up to the hype on film. He lacks Brian Cushing's elite athleticism but is just as productive and will start early in his NFL career.

10 ○ Tyson Jackson
DE, LSU (6-5, 292)

Jackson is not as good as ex-teammate Glenn Dorsey (No. 5 overall this year), but is highly regarded. While not an explosive edge rusher along the lines of a Dwight Freeney, Jackson has the size, strength, athleticism and competitiveness to be a good strongside end in a 4-3 defense or play either end spot in a 3-4 scheme. **SN**

— Russ Lande

Former NFL scout Russ Lande evaluates college players for Sporting News' Pro Football War Room (http://warroom.sportingnews.com).

CLOCKWISE FROM LAURINAITIS: JAY DROWNS / SN; BRUCE SCHWARTZMAN; JAY DROWNS; PAUL NISELY / SN

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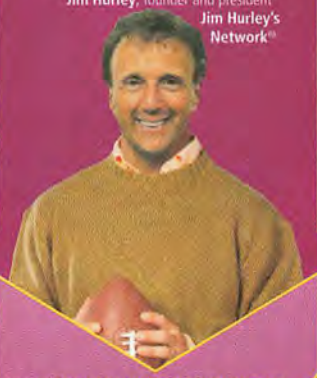

A30 **PRESEASON GAME OF THE YEAR**			
Steelers (+3½)	Panthers	19-3	W
Jets (+2½)	Eagles	13-11	W
A26 Steelers (-3)	Eagles	27-13	W
A25 Colts (-6½)	Lions	37-10	W
Texans (+3)	Cowboys	28-16	W
Cards (+3)	Chargers	31-33	W
Cards/Chargers	(Over 40½)	31-33	W
A24 **PRESEASON TOTALS OF THE YEAR**			
Patriots/Panthers	(Under 38)	24-7	W
Panthers(-1)	Patriots	7-24	L
Raiders (+1½)	Rams	20-10	W
A23 Jags/Packers	(Over 37½)	21-13	L
A20 Bears (-2½)	Colts	27-24	W
A18 **SIDE/TOTALS GRAND SLAM**			
Texans (+3)	Cards	33-20	W
Texans/Cardls	(Over 35½)	33-20	W
Saints/Bengals	(Over 38½)	27-19	W
Packers (-2½)	S'hawks	48-13	W
A17 Titans (+5½)	Pats	27-24	W
A16 Chiefs (-3)	Dolphins	10-11	L
A13 Broncos (+3)	49'ers	17-13	W
A12 S'hawks/Chrgrs	(Over 36½)	24-16	W
A11 Panthers (pk)	Giants	24-21	W
Texans (+1)	Bears	19-20	P
Skins/Titans	(Under 35½)	14-6	W
A 5 **HALL OF FAME GAME**			
Steelers (-3)	Saints	20-7	W

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S22	SEPT COLLEGE GAME OF MONTH	Georgia (+3½)	Alabama	26-23	W
S30	NFL UPSET GAME OF MONTH	Lions (+3)	Bears	37-27	W
O20	OCT COLLEGE GAME OF MONTH	USC (-17½)	Notre Dame	38-0	W

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10 QUESTIONS FOR JIM ZORN

The new coach of the Redskins shares his thoughts on how he landed this coveted NFL job, how his life has changed because of it and home improvement.

By Dennis Dillon

Jim Zorn lasted all of two weeks as the Redskins' offensive coordinator. It's not that he couldn't hold the job; he just got a better offer. The original QB of the Seattle Seahawks—the scrambling lefty injected a buzz into the Pacific Northwest sports scene—now occupies the most important position in Washington. Right there above Dubya.

SPORTING NEWS: Most head coaches are coordinators first. What makes you think you can skip that critical step?

ZORN: I think I can because I've been in this business 33 years. It's not just the years; it's also the people who have influenced me through those years—teammates, really good coaches, excellent administrators. All along the way, I've listened and I've observed and I've been proactive and involved as much as my "position" honorably allowed me to. I really put a lot of value on being creative without overstepping my authority.

SN: What was your reaction when Dan Snyder offered you the job?

ZORN: What was more interesting was how I got the opportunity to be interviewed for it. I was working on a Thursday morning with my staff when somebody came in and said, "Dan Snyder wants you to come out to his house for lunch so he can introduce you to a couple of the other owners." I thought to myself, "This is what the head coach should be doing, not the offensive coordinator. But ... there is no head coach." I went to his house and met two key owners—his sister, Michele Snyder, and Dwight Schar. After lunch, they excused themselves. Then Dan came back in, propped his elbow up on the mantel of the fireplace in his office and asked me if I'd like to interview for the head-coaching job. And I said absolutely.

SN: What did you do to prepare yourself for becoming an NFL head coach?

ZORN: I listened to Chuck Knox (Zorn's head coach as a player in Seattle). When I asked him to hire me on his Seahawks staff, he said, "No, you need to go out and start at a level where you can actually function at. Start at the college level or high school level, if you have to, and work your way up." So I began as an offensive assistant at Boise State. I also was fortunate to be on staffs with Bobby Ross in Detroit for three years and with Mike Holmgren in Seattle for seven years—watching, observing, listening, adjusting my own coaching based on the things I was learning.

SN: What's it like being the head coach for one of the NFL's most storied franchises?

ZORN: I am holding it in high regard. I think it deserves that because of the history and tradition and from the top of the ownership. Dan Snyder treats this franchise with the utmost respect and cares about it deeply. Secondly, there have been a lot of people who have worked in dramatic ways over the years to create the identity and integrity of the NFL. We are a franchise in the NFL, so there's a lot of respect there as well.

SN: Did you think you'd ever wind up in this position?

ZORN: I didn't have a feel for if it would ever come. I could kind of understand what the formula for being an offensive coordinator was like. I never understood how guys were getting head-coaching jobs. You would never have written the scenario of how I got this job. It's an amazing phenomenon. Look at Jim Mora Jr. He was a head coach (in Atlanta), made a statement that helped remove him from that position, came to Seattle and now is the future head coach of the Seahawks.

SN: What has surprised you most about the job?

ZORN: How much the decision-making changes every day. It's pretty awesome. One day in April, I was heavily into draft meetings trying to get to know players and grading them. I was out on the field working with the QBs and wide receivers. I met with some people in my office about an issue. I met some potential draft choices who came in to visit and, then, that night, I had dinner with another group of potential draft picks.

SN: What was the lowest point in your football career, and what did you learn from it?

ZORN: Being demoted from the starter to a backup in Seattle. That was very difficult. I had professed my Christianity in public many times over; I was trying to live out my Christian life. As a starter, it's not that difficult. When I got demoted, I believed that God said, "OK, now let's see how you deal with this, when things aren't going so well." I had to make a decision: Was I going to continue to live that out, or was I going to be mean and nasty? I really felt like being mean and nasty, but I wanted people to truly understand I wasn't all talk. Sometimes you have to make a decision based not on how you feel but what is right. That's what I tried to do.

SN: You're installing the West Coast offense. What can fans expect to see?

ZORN: I'm going to try to stay true to what was going on here in the running game before I got here, but I'm going to inject the passing game we had in Seattle under Mike Holmgren. This West Coast system has been game-tested over the years and is very difficult to defend. It's balanced and sound.

SN: What's it like to follow in the footsteps of Joe Gibbs?

ZORN: Every day, I walk by three Super Bowl trophies, I want you to know. All three of those trophies have his name on them. I am not even going to pretend to outdo, upstage or do anything but just tap that case and appreciate what he accomplished in his coaching career. Joe has offered me an opportunity to call him and talk to him, and every chance I get I'm going to listen to what he has to say.

SN: What unique talent do you have outside of football?

ZORN: I like to work with my hands. I built a deck on the back of my house in Seattle one summer. Last year, I built a stone fireplace in my family room. And I like to ride mountain bikes. We go up to Whistler Mountain in Canada every summer—my son-in-law and I, and now my kids are getting involved as well—and we hammer down some of the downhill runs. It's incredible fun.

JOSE LUIS MAGANA / AP

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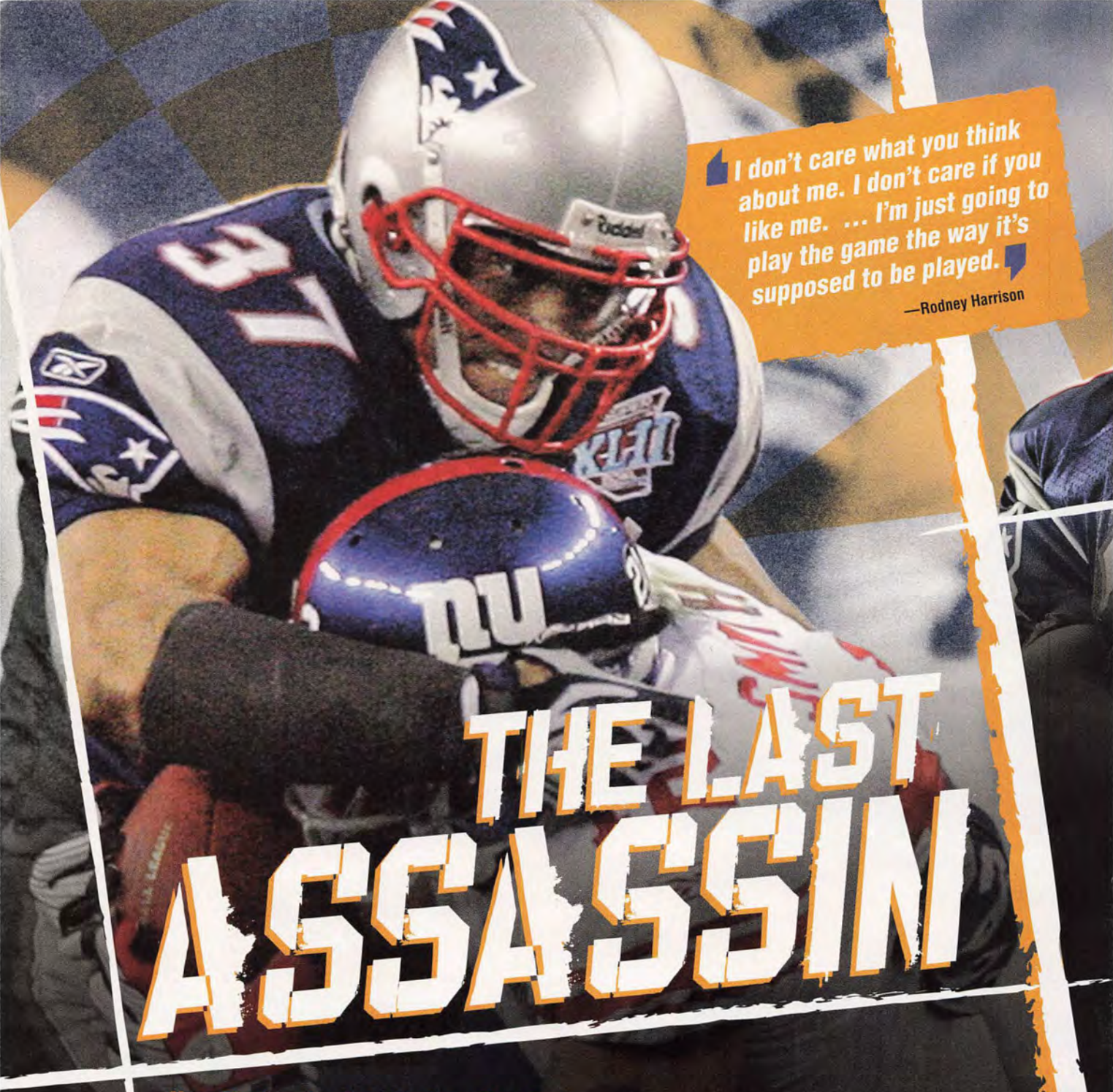


> I don't care what you think about me. I don't care if you like me. ... I'm just going to play the game the way it's supposed to be played.
>
> —Rodney Harrison

THE LAST ASSASSIN

New England safety Rodney Harrison uses fear and intimidation to play the game in a way that the modern-day NFL wants no part of.

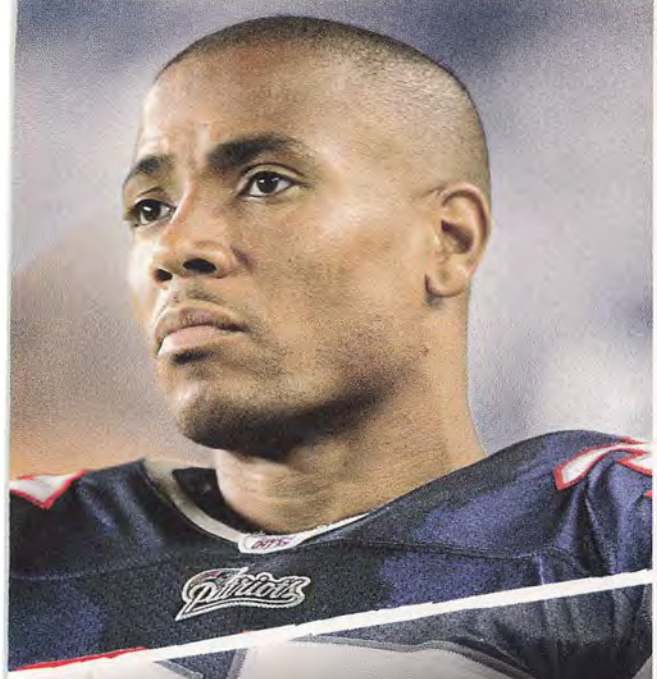
By Mike Giglio, Sporting News

They Call Me Assassin, read the title of the book written by the most feared man in the NFL. For years Jack Tatum had assaulted opponents with moves that had names like The Hook and The Groundhog. He'd kept tallies of what he called "knockouts" and "limp-offs," and in almost a decade of patrolling the defensive backfield for John Madden's Oakland Raiders, those tallies had grown spectacularly high.

"I never make a tackle just to bring someone down. I want to punish the man I'm going after and I want him to know that it's going to hurt every time he comes my way," Tatum wrote in the autobiography, which was published following the 1979 season. "I like to believe that my best hits border on felonious assault."

Tatum was called other things—hit man, warhead—besides assassin. Chuck Noll, head coach of the rival Steelers, added the term "criminal element" to the list. Eventually, fines were levied, and a media storm began to rage. The argument over Tatum's character and playing style has never ended for some, often revolving around the hit that paralyzed Patriots receiver Darryl Stingley during a preseason game in 1978. It surfaced again last April, when Stingley passed away due to complications from the injury.

That hit wasn't penalized and has been repeatedly called legal by Chuck Fairbanks, New England's coach



at the time. Tatum, for his part, maintained that he always played within the framework of the game, though he did admit to bending the rules to his advantage and even suggested altering them to protect offensive players from violent hitters like himself.

By the time he retired in 1980, the process had already begun. That year, striking or grabbing an opponent's head or neck became a personal foul. At the same time, the passing game was gradually being opened up to allow for more points and excitement.

Assassins of a sort still existed, of course. Players like Ronnie Lott and Steve Atwater, who garnered greater accolades than Tatum without coming near his level of notoriety, were still able to blast their way through the league. But the trend toward outlawing big hits and unleashing quarterbacks and their receivers continues. As fines and flags become more frequent, the defensive back who dominates games—and headlines—by way of intimidation is becoming harder to find. It's a dying breed.

Rodney Harrison, the 35-year-old strong safety for the New England Patriots, pushes his sneaker to the gas pedal. His shiny, black Cadillac Escalade lurches forward, and soon big, pretty houses and trees flash by. He rounds a curve. A pristine golf course appears in the windshield, its fairways a vivid green in the fading sunlight of an April evening.

Harrison pulls up to the gate of the Atlanta country club community that's his home during the offseason and brakes abruptly as it rises. Then he jets beneath it, hangs a right in front of fast-approaching traffic and hits the gas.

From the left lane, he spots a car ahead in the distance, idling at a stop sign on the other side of the road. As the Escalade approaches, the car guns it across two pairs of headlights and pauses precariously at the divider in a dangerous attempt at a left turn.

(L TO R): STEPHAN SAVOIA / AP PHOTO; ADAM HUNGER / US PRESSWIRE

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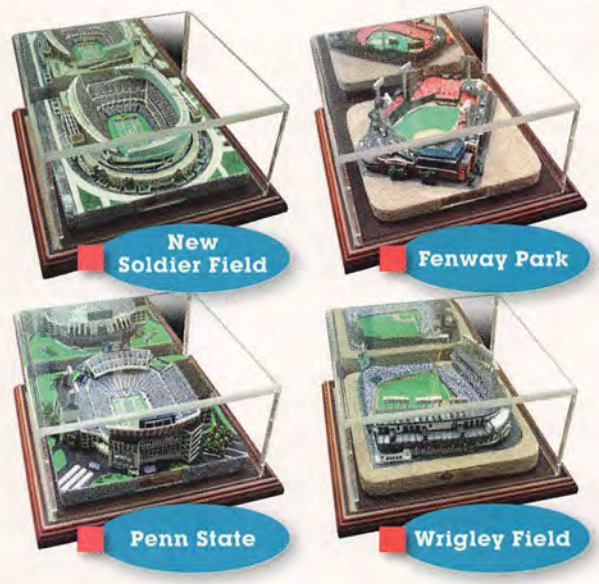

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SportingNews SPORTS GEAR

Harrison shoots his left arm straight out the window and points at the car. He follows it with his index finger and glare as he passes, like he might a receiver in motion at the line of scrimmage. This appears to freeze the other driver in his tracks.

Five fast minutes later, the old and faded basketball court at a Bally's gym is already full of the usual suspects, but Harrison has made it in time for the first game.

At 6-1 and 208 muscle-packed pounds, he mostly plays around the key. Fair-skinned and good-looking with a thin, careful goatee and closely cropped hair, he seems younger than his 35 years. He wears a diamond-stud earring, Nike high-tops, loose shorts and a red performance turtleneck that only a football player would own. He plays alongside his close friend, a 45-year-old man named Dwayne Burton, who is called "Prime Time" by Harrison and "Old School" by everyone on the long, faded bench behind one of the baskets. Once the game starts, the two snap into deadly serious scowls.

Their team wins six straight games by breaking down the opposition physically and mentally. They bump and bruise. If they get pushed, they push back, often harder. Players make their own foul calls in pickup basketball. On defense, Harrison and Burton contest almost every one. Once they have the ball, they're the first to blow the imaginary whistle.

By the end of each game, the other team has typically resorted to complaining, launching threes and giving up on defense. One player even quits in protest at game point. Many spectators, meanwhile, begin openly rooting against Harrison and his teammates. Eventually, some start calling them dirty.

"He's foulin'!" one man shouts at Harrison.

"He calls that a foul? I call that a travel!" another says.

"They've been doing this for like 10 years," someone else finally says with a sigh.

Not everyone agrees, though. In an aggressive, in-your-face brand of basketball, it's hard to draw the line. One thing is clear: Harrison's squad excels at this relentless, physical game. They're also the only ones to play as a team; Harrison racks up countless assists throughout the night. At the end of each game, he sprints off to buy five Gatorades for his teammates. He's in his element.

"I gotta have that outlet," he says later. "That's why I play basketball. That's why I play golf. That's why I swim. I'm very competitive in any and everything that I do. Anything. I'm gonna try to rip your head off in checkers. I'm gonna try to make you go bankrupt in Monopoly. That's just what I am."

On the football field, Harrison might be the most feared and disliked defensive back in the NFL. He punishes receivers over the middle, or wherever he finds them. He strikes like a bolt of lightning on the safety blitz. He plays to and sometimes through the whistle. He's the most aggressive player on an aggressive defense, and he's all over the field.

"He brings a toughness and an element of physical play to our team," Patriots coach Bill Belichick says. "We kind of feel like we have that anyway, but he certainly ratchets it up a notch."

In coverage, Harrison has hung with dynamic receivers like Carolina's Steve Smith and freak-of-nature tight ends like San Diego's Antonio Gates. He's the only player in NFL history with 30 sacks (30.5) and 30 picks (33) in his career. But it's the sledgehammer hits that often stand out on the highlight reel and in the minds of the people on the other side of the line.

Patriots linebacker Tedy Bruschi says Harrison is the first person a quarterback checks for: "He's gonna find out where 37's coming from, because that's where we're most physical and have the biggest presence."

Sometimes, Harrison can sense a receiver's trepidation.

"They're looking," he says. "I don't know if they're afraid, but they're looking. From the best ones to the worst ones, you best believe they're looking. And it's great. Because now they're focused on something else—you—instead of focusing on their job."

When Harrison signed with the Patriots to replace popular safety Lawyer Milloy in 2003, he got into some early scuffles with his new teammates who, according to Belichick, had to adjust to the way he practices. By the end of the preseason, he was a defensive captain. His presence helped a unit that had finished 17th in points allowed and 18th in passing scores allowed improve to first in both categories. In 2003 and 2004, when the Pats won back-to-back Super Bowls, Harrison totaled 54 tackles, two sacks, two forced fumbles, six interceptions and a touchdown in the postseason.

Yet for all his success on the field, he has made just two Pro Bowls, the last in 2001—largely due to his reputation as a dirty player. During both the 2004 and 2006 seasons, *Sports Illustrated* polled close to 350 current and former NFL players, asking them to write in the name of the dirtiest player in the league. Each time, Harrison won in a landslide. He has accumulated more than $200,000 in fines for what have been deemed late or illegal hits. In 2003 and 2004, his last two full seasons, he was the most penalized player in the AFC.

"If I was a wide receiver, and somebody was going to knock my head off—hitting me in the mouth, hitting me in the nose, hitting me in the chest, knocking me on my butt—would I think he's a good player or a fair player? No. I would think he's probably dirty," Harrison says.

"Because it's relentless. I don't stop. I mean, that's just my personality. I'm just going to keep coming at you. I don't care what you think about me. I don't care if you like me. I don't care if you shake my hand after the game. You know, there was a point in time when I didn't care if my teammates liked me. I'm just going to play the game the way it's supposed to be played."

CHARLES KRUPA / AP WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

Even in the 14 years Harrison has been in the league, the definition of how the game is supposed to be played has changed. The passing game is now even more unhinged. Most recently, after the Patriots manhandled Indianapolis receivers in a 2003 AFC championship game victory, the illegal-contact rule became a "point of emphasis" for the 2004 season. Nearly 10 quarterbacks posted career bests in touchdown passes that year. In 1993, the year before Harrison entered the league, teams averaged 200.6 passing yards per game and 18.5 passing touchdowns a

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season. Last year, those numbers stood at 214.3 and 22.5.

"Do I think the league is trying to help the passing game? Sure," Belichick says. "No doubt about it—the way they protect the quarterbacks and receivers and make it hard to contact the guys. They don't want a 10-3 game."

The area in which a defender can strike a quarterback now starts at the shoulder pads and ends just above the knees. Hitting with one's helmet is a personal foul, as are horse-collar tackles and any hits to a player's head. Defenders can now be penalized for striking someone in a defenseless position.

"What is a defenseless position?" Harrison asks. "Every time a wide receiver goes up for the ball, he's in a defenseless position."

Then he begins to rattle off the myriad fines he has accumulated over the years. He sets aside money before each season just to cover them. But not everyone has that luxury.

"If you're wondering if you're going to get fined, a new young player and you don't have much money, guess what? You're not going to make that big hit. I mean, it's changing the course of the game," he says.

"They used to call it hard-nosed. Now they call it dirty."

Now the assassin challenges you to look into his eyes. Find what drives him on the field; see what defines him off of it. Will you call him dirty then?

In the living room of his comfortable home, he stoops down to his 16-month-old son Rodney Junior, or R.J. Both have tears in their eyes. R.J. cries—loudly, with stubby arms shooting straight out—because his dad is brushing his thick, curly hair for school. Harrison cries because, no matter how many times this happens, he can't stop laughing.

He moves to the kitchen and finds 4-year-old Christian, who smiles sheepishly as he is scooped up and carried around the room. Harrison also has a teenage stepdaughter named Michale. After early prayer and training sessions, he and his wife, Erika, drive R.J. and Christian to school. He works out again later in the day, then usually makes it home for dinner. Not having his father around as a kid, he says, taught him the importance of being there for his family.

Down the stairs from the kitchen, in a large, finished basement, are 14 NFL seasons worth of mementos, all polished and preserved. Game balls, rows and rows of them, fill a bookcase that reaches from the ceiling to the floor. They include awards like Special Teams Player of the Game from 1994, Harrison's rookie season, which he spent busting up wedges for San Diego's kickoff team.

Along the walls are framed jerseys, autographed by teammates as well as opponents—even receivers. Harrison pauses before one of his hero, Ronnie Lott. Then he moves to an enlarged photograph taken just after the Patriots beat the Panthers in Super Bowl 38. Engulfed in a swirl of confetti, his left arm raised in triumph, his right arm in a sling, Harrison is weeping. He has called the photograph a symbol of his life and career.

His first order of business is to hit you in the mouth, and then physically and mentally destroy you.

—Steve Feldman, Harrison's longtime agent

Of all the childhood stories that help explain Rodney Harrison, two stand out. He tells the first often. In it, 6-year-old Rodney wants to start playing organized football, which costs $40. But his mother, Barbara, who worked two and three jobs at a time to raise Rodney and his older brother and sister on her own, had a $40 utility bill due. She only had enough money for one, and chose football. Rodney promised he'd buy her a house when he made the NFL. Twenty years later, as it turned out, he kept his word.

Many of the scenes from Harrison's ascent to football glory show the poor kid, the underdog, relentlessly working to pull himself up. At Marian Catholic School in Chicago Heights, Ill., his uniforms came from the thrift store. His mother's tan Chevy Chevette had a red door and a wood panel covering up a hole in the floor; most of Harrison's peers in high school drove nicer cars. Whenever the Chevette broke down on his mother's way to drop him off at school, people laughed at him. But on the football field, where he handled everything from kick returns to place-kicking duties, and basketball court, where he led Marian to a rare regional title, the laughter turned to cheers.

Dave Mattio, now in his 32nd year as head football coach at Marian, calls Harrison the most competitive player he's ever seen. Coaches around the league still speak with reverence about the hits he delivered from the free safety spot.

"Rodney's always looking for an edge," Mattio says. "I think he's so well-schooled mentally, he understands he can take his competitiveness, take his training, take the name of an individual, a mascot on a helmet, and find a way to motivate himself to come up with a big play and get to a new level."

High school players with the talent and athleticism to one day make the NFL often coast until they reach the next level of competition. Harrison didn't.

"Knowing that you're good and trying to be great are two different things," he says. "I knew I was good, but I wanted to be great. I wanted to be legendary."

And so the underdog story goes, through high school and into college, where Harrison says his goofing off on the ACT scared the big programs away. He ended up at Division I-AA Western Illinois, where he made All-America twice and entered the draft after just three years. Then the fifth-round pick was told he had little chance of making it with the Chargers, because he was too small and the team too stacked in the defensive backfield. He made a living on special teams and earned the starting spot at strong safety outright in his third year.

It takes a rare combination of natural talent and uncommon motivation for a player to become truly great. And great players make Pro Bowls. A legend, though,

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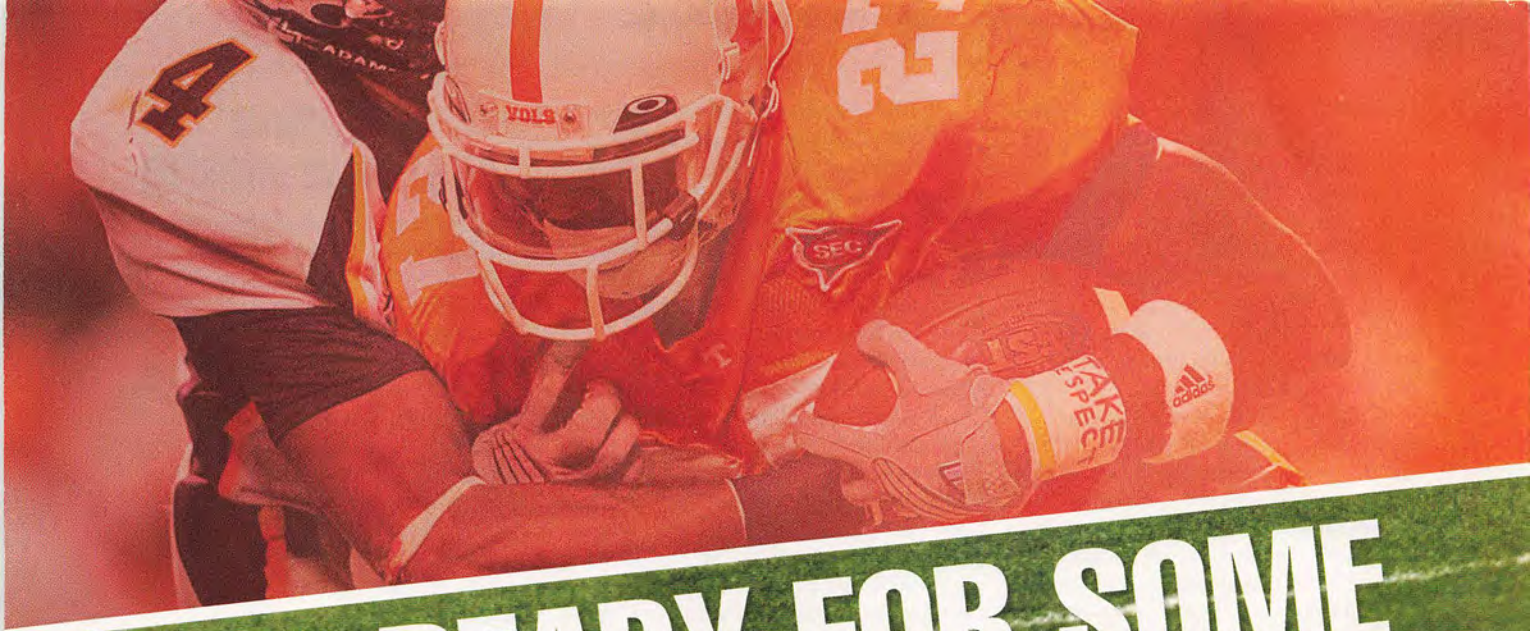

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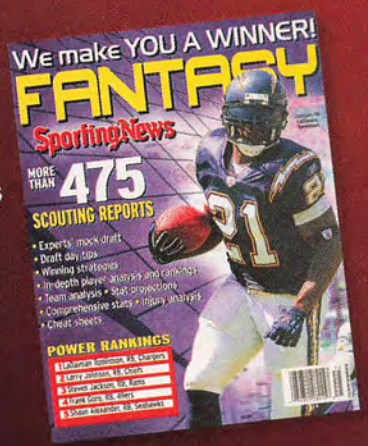

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requires something else. He is whispered about before games, warned of in practice, scrutinized in the media and loved or hated by fans. When he moves on from the game, he leaves his stories behind.

It doesn't take a host of Pro Bowls to become a legend. Jack Tatum made just three. It doesn't require a pass to the Hall of Fame, either. Tatum never received one. But for better or worse, the Tatum legend lives on.

In Harrison's second story, he is a teenager. The neighborhood bully, who's much bigger and older, has been pushing him around. Harrison begins to doubt himself and turns to walk away. But his best friend, who lives across the street, is there to stop him in his tracks. *You will not walk away. You will stand your ground.* Something clicks. Harrison takes off his jacket. Soon the bully is bruised and bleeding and running away.

Fear permeates the game of football. There is the fear of getting hit, of getting hurt, of letting a teammate get hit or hurt—and of hurting someone else. To compete, a player must learn to control fear. An assassin instills it in his opponents.

"Fear is something we all deal with," says Ronnie Lott, a Hall-of-Fame defensive back who helped the 49ers win four Super Bowls in the 1980s, from his office at the Woodside, Calif., venture capital firm he founded in 1999. "The one thing that I can tell you about sports is you always have those guys that can create fear.

"And then there are guys that can also use it as a weapon, or even a skill. You have to know how to use it to push buttons with people and get them out of their game. It's not just being angry. It's being strategic about it, thinking about it and really using it in a way where it can be effective."

Lott compares a big hitter in football to a knockout artist in boxing. Mike Tyson wasn't great because of his size or strength, he points out. When the time called for it, he could channel his emotion into a single, devastating blow. That's how Lott approached every tackle. Harnessing such emotion is extremely difficult to master.

"If you know Rodney Harrison, you know what he puts into the effort of trying to be great," Lott says. "A lot of preparation goes into that persona and that attitude and that passion of playing the way he plays."

Sometimes, the persona cracks. Fear returns, and old battles must be fought again.

In 2001, Harrison made the Pro Bowl and was at the top of his game. The following year, he tore his groin. Thirty-five percent of the muscle came off the bone. He took pain pills and cortisone shots and played through it, but his stats dipped. After the season, the Chargers cut him, telling him he'd lost it. It crushed him. He panicked.

Harrison won't say exactly when or how many times he took HGH, but that's how he confronted the flood of emotion, and blow to his confidence, that came with being cut.

"I went through a lot of pain that year out there playing," he says. "You know, and here you go and get cut. You get hurt, and you're doing any and everything to get healthy. I didn't have surgery on my groin. So then I took that route, which was a bad mistake. But, it did allow me to get healthy. … You can't continue to have a job if you're not healthy."

Harrison sits in a tiny chair at a fast food restaurant near his home, dressed, as always, in Nike athletic gear. His left knee sticks out from under the table. A long, thick scar runs down the knee, a reminder of the ACL, PCL and MCL tears that cost him most of the 2005 season and threatened to end his career.

Eventually, the HGH use made its way into the news. Just before the start of the 2007 season, the NFL announced that Harrison had violated its banned-substance policy, after his name surfaced in a sting on an Internet distribution ring. He would miss the first four games without pay. Harrison was ashamed and embarrassed when he first found out. Then he decided to own up to it.

"You can run and hide. You can deny it. Or you can stand up and be a man and face the music," he says. "I chose the latter. Eventually, the truth will be told."

Now the doubters and critics have returned in full force. He gets taunted by fans and even players about his suspension. He has also been accused of taking steroids, which he has not been linked to and insists he would never use, or need.

"It's what's inside your heart," he says. "And no matter what anyone says to this day, you don't know what's inside of Rodney Harrison. You don't know the passion, the hard work, the commitment, everything that drives me inside. So you tell me I can't do it? Hmm. I show you another thing."

And just like that, he is the underdog again, with something to prove.

'THE CATCH' STILL PAINS HARRISON

Forget for a moment about the other 64 plays of Super Bowl 42. Forget the Giants' unstoppable pass rush and that, for the first time in their recent run of Super Bowl wins, the Patriots weren't the most fired-up team on the field. Forget that what has gone down in football history as simply "The Catch" didn't even put the Giants in the end zone for the game-winning score.

When Eli Manning took the snap with 1:15 left and his team down 14-10, the Giants were still expected, as they had been all along, to become the 19th and final victim of New England's perfect season. But when David Tyree came down with his improbable catch 10 seconds later, they suddenly seemed destined to win.

Fate seemed even more certain because it was Rodney Harrison—the heart of the Patriots' vaunted defense, their intimidator— ripping and pulling at the ball from Tyree's back. If Harrison's fiercest effort couldn't break up the catch, nothing would.

Harrison becomes animated at the thought.

"You could throw that ball a million other times, and it'll never happen," he says, reliving the play out loud.

Manning drops back, and the pressure comes from his blind side. He feels it at the last moment and steps up, but the pocket is collapsing. Someone grabs him by the shoulder pad. The rest of the defensive linemen close in. But Manning gets swung outside of the pocket and somehow manages to keep his feet, with just enough room for a desperation pass.

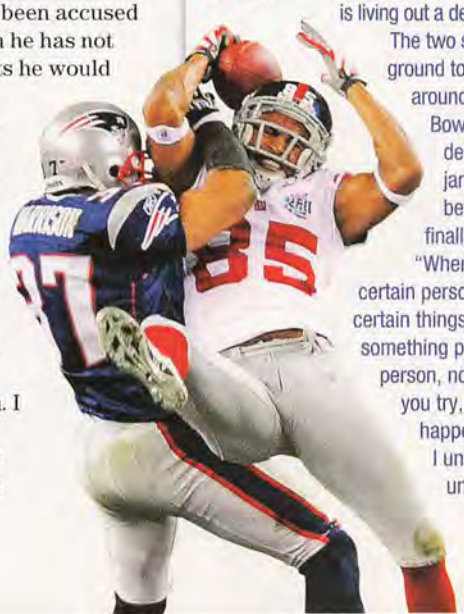
"We had the guy," Harrison says, his voice rising. "We had Manning in our grasp, sacked. Two, three guys, had him. Three-hundred-pounders, had him. Boom. I mean, it never happens. That's when I knew the play was destiny."

The pass flies 45 yards through the air. It's too high. Tyree jumps up and reaches for it, and Harrison goes up after him, making contact just as the ball arrives. Somehow, Tyree manages to pin it against his helmet, with Harrison raging and clawing with the passion of a man who believes he is living out a destiny of his own.

The two slam into the ground together, then roll around on the Super Bowl logo as Harrison desperately tries to jar the ball loose, before someone finally pulls him away.

"When a team or a certain person is destined for certain things, when God has something planned for that person, no matter what you try, it's going to happen," he says. "So I understand that. I understand that."

—Mike Giglio



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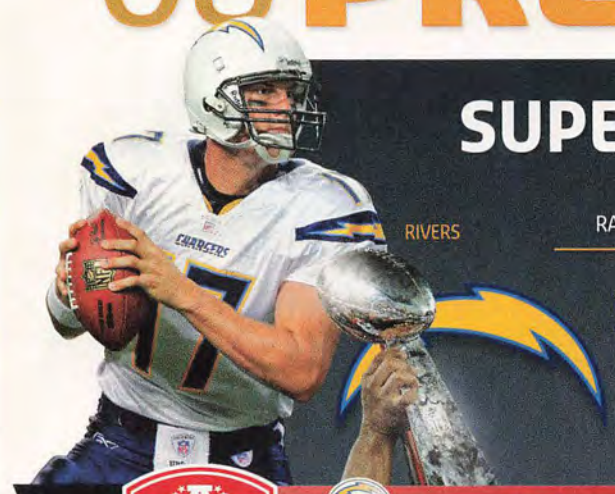

SUPER BOWL XLIII

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SAN DIEGO over **DALLAS**

AFC CHAMPIONSHIP GAME

SAN DIEGO over NEW ENGLAND

NFC CHAMPIONSHIP GAME

DALLAS over GREEN BAY

AFC EAST

1	New England	P. 86
2	New York Jets	P. 92
3	Buffalo	P. 32
4	Miami	P. 80

AFC NORTH

1	Pittsburgh	P. 104
2	Cincinnati*	P. 38
3	Cleveland	P. 44
4	Baltimore	P. 26

AFC SOUTH

1	Indianapolis	P. 62
2	Jacksonville*	P. 68
3	Tennessee	P. 116
4	Houston	P. 56

AFC WEST

1	San Diego	P. 110
2	Denver	P. 50
3	Kansas City	P. 74
4	Oakland	P. 98

NFC EAST

1	Dallas	P. 148
2	New York Giants*	P. 178
3	Philadelphia	P. 184
4	Washington	P. 214

NFC NORTH

1	Green Bay	P. 160
2	Chicago*	P. 142
3	Minnesota	P. 166
4	Detroit	P. 154

NFC SOUTH

1	New Orleans	P. 172
2	Tampa Bay	P. 208
3	Carolina	P. 136
4	Atlanta	P. 130

NFC WEST

1	Seattle	P. 202
2	St. Louis	P. 190
3	Arizona	P. 124
4	San Francisco	P. 196

*indicates Wild Card

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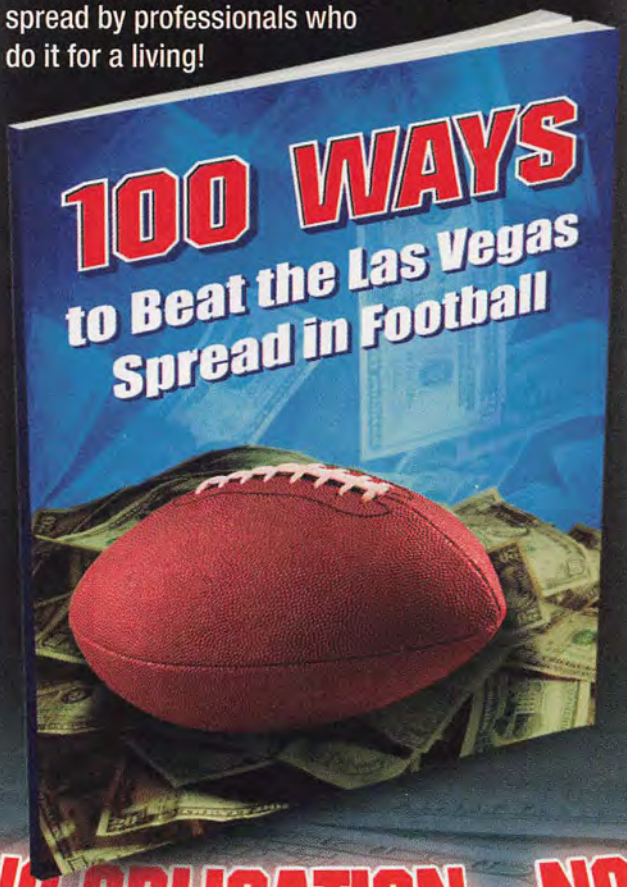

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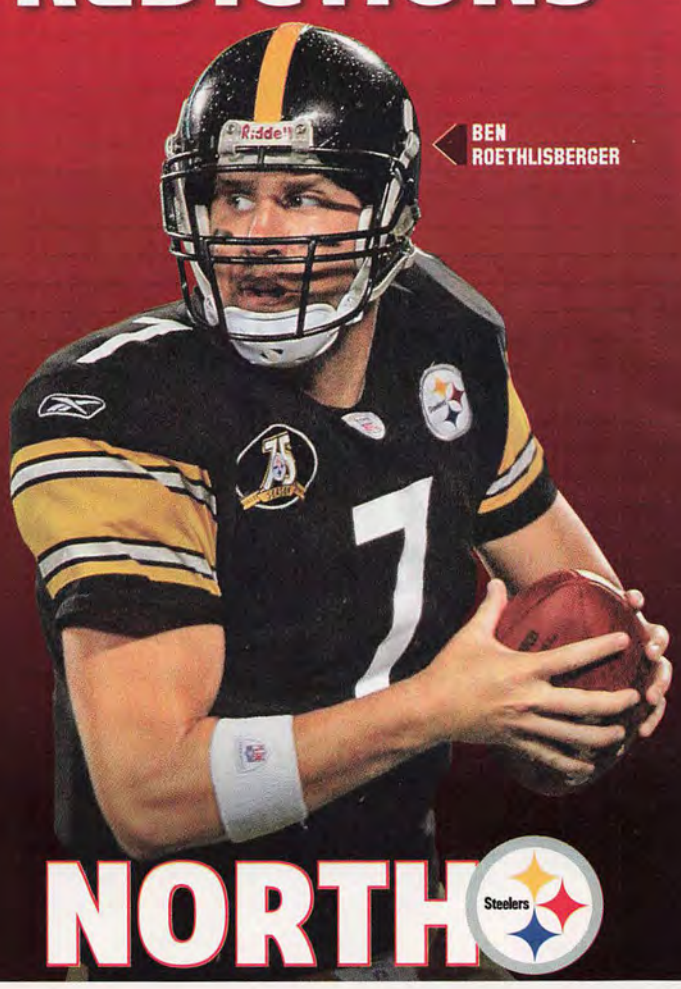


EAST

1» PATRIOTS 14-2
It would be foolish to think they could make a run at another perfect regular season. It would be even more foolish to think they won't be Super Bowl contenders.

2» JETS 8-8
They made a big splash in free agency (Alan Faneca, Calvin Pace, Kris Jenkins, et al), but they're still swimming upstream in this division.

3» BILLS 5-11
This is a team with some good, young talent, but it needs to make a decision on who's going to be the quarterback—and then stick with him.

4» DOLPHINS 3-13
Of all the reclamation work Bill Parcells has undertaken during his NFL career, restoring luster to this franchise will be the most challenging.

NORTH

1» STEELERS 11-5
Ben Roethlisberger doesn't throw as many passes as some other QBs—nor does he get near the notoriety—but he's brilliantly effective when he does.

2» BENGALS 10-6
They added several defensive reinforcements and the offense should have enough firepower to contend for the division title—with or without Ocho Cinco.

3» BROWNS 9-7
Cleveland should be a better team than it was last year, yet it could wind up with a worse record because of a schedule that can only be described as brutal.

4» RAVENS 6-10
The defense has been carrying this team on its shoulders since the 2000 Super Bowl season. Don't expect things to change this year.

BOB LEVERONE / SN (2)

AFC CHAMPIONSHIP GAME

CHARGERS **OVER** PATRIOTS

WILD-CARD GAMES

JAGUARS **OVER** STEELERS
COLTS **OVER** BENGALS

DIVISIONAL GAMES

PATRIOTS **OVER** JAGUARS
CHARGERS **OVER** COLTS

SUPER BOWL 43

CHARGERS **OVER** COWBOYS

By Dennis Dillon, *Sporting News*

(L TO R): BRIAN SPURLOCK, KYLE TERADA / US PRESSWIRE

1» COLTS 13-3

Give it up for the defense. Led by NFL Defensive Player of the Year Bob Sanders, Indianapolis allowed the fewest points in the league last season.

2» JAGUARS 12-4

Jack Del Rio's superb coaching and astute personnel moves—not to mention his occasionally exquisite sideline appearance—have Jacksonville nipping at the heels of Indianapolis.

3» TITANS 6-10

Stop me if you've heard this before: If the Titans could just give quarterback Vince Young a big playmaker at wide receiver ...

4» TEXANS 5-11

Until it can find a premier left tackle who can anchor the offensive line for the next 10 years or so, Houston's progress will continue to be s-l-o-w.

1» CHARGERS 14-2

They finished strong in 2007 despite injuries to Antonio Gates and LaDainian Tomlinson. If Philip Rivers can step up his game a notch, this team could be Super.

2» BRONCOS 9-7

If they figure out their defense, they could be playoff contenders. If they don't, next season could be Mike Shanahan's last stand.

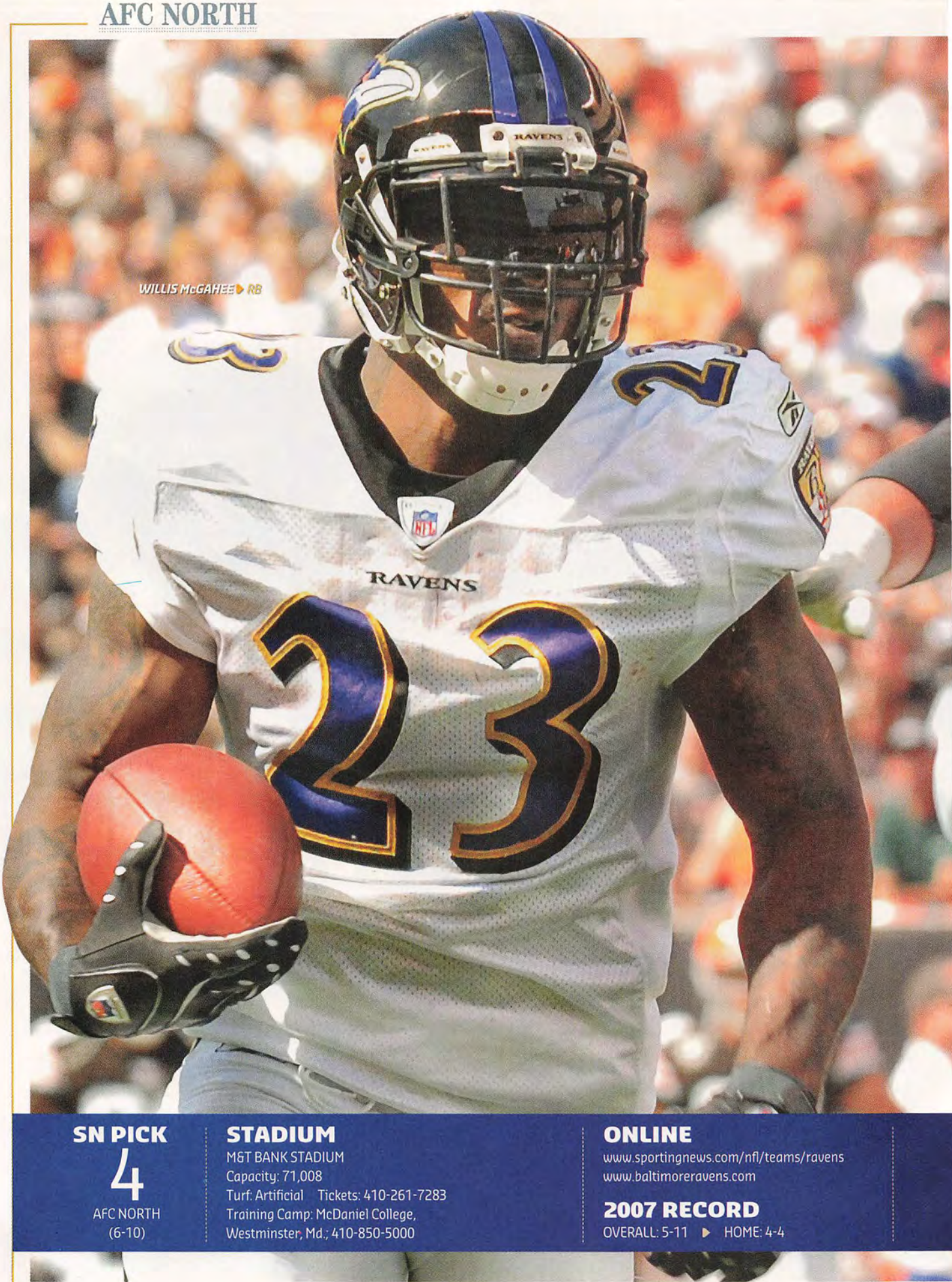
3» CHIEFS 5-11

Training camp will be like a casting call for Kansas City. There could be as many as seven positions open for rookies to win.

4» RAIDERS 3-13

Despite some nice offseason additions—CB DeAngelo Hall, S Gibril Wilson, WR Javon Walker and rookie RB Darren McFadden—they still have a long way to go.

Draft reports by Russ Lande



SN PICK
4
AFC NORTH
(6-10)

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2007 RECORD

OVERALL: 5-11 ▶ HOME: 4-4

(L TO R): DAVID DUROCHIK FOR SN; SCOTT BOEHM / GETTY IMAGES; HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL MEDIA

BALTIMORE RAVENS

Can aging defensive stalwarts keep them competitive in a rebuilding year?

By Mike Preston, *Baltimore Sun*

When Ravens veteran quarterback Steve McNair announced his retirement on April 17, it unofficially began the rebuilding process in Baltimore.

It's not a complete facelift, but the transition involves revamping an entire offense and trying to establish the same demeanor on that side of the ball that the Ravens have had on defense since 2000.

The Ravens still have aging—but great—defensive players like linebacker Ray Lewis, end Trevor Pryce and cornerbacks Samari Rolle and Chris McAlister. There is enough talent left to keep Baltimore competitive in every game.

But the Ravens don't have that kind of experience, nastiness and work ethic on offense—not yet anyway. New coach John Harbaugh says it is a work-in-progress.

The Ravens have a good core of youthful offensive linemen and two young quarterbacks to build around, including first-round draft pick Joe Flacco out of Delaware.

BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

HALOTI NGATA ▶ DT

In just two seasons, Ngata has already established himself as one of the best run-stoppers in the game. But this year he'll prove he is a complete player. Ngata has had two offseasons to reshape his body and turn some of his baby fat into muscle. He simply outmuscled the opposition in his first two campaigns, but he has learned a great deal of technique while studying teammate and fellow tackle Kelly Gregg. Ngata used to be able to only hold his ground at the line of scrimmage. By the end of last season, he was so quick off the ball, and so much better with his hands, that he began making plays behind the line.

INSIDE THE HEADSET

JOHN HARBAUGH

This is John Harbaugh's first year as a head coach, but he is attack-oriented. He retained Rex Ryan as defensive coordinator, which means Harbaugh is blitz-happy, just like his former team, the Eagles. One of the main staples of the Ravens' offense will be the no-huddle, which means Harbaugh wants a fast-paced and aggressive style. Harbaugh has shown a lot of energy since coming to Baltimore. That will be his team's M.O.

OFFSEASON MOVES

ADDITIONS:

LB **Brendon Ayanbadejo** *(FA/ Bears)*, DB **Frank Walker** *(FA/ Packers)*, K **E.J. Cochrane** *(FA/ Eagles)*, CB **Fabian Washington** *(trade/Raiders)*

SUBTRACTIONS:

RB **Mike Anderson** *(FA)*, C **Mike Flynn** *(FA)*, WR **Devard Darling** *(FA/Chiefs)*, RB **B.J. Sams** *(FA/ Chiefs)*, QB **Cullen Finnerty** *(FA, Broncos)*, DB **Gerome Sapp** *(FA)*, RB **Musa Smith** *(FA)*, QB **Steve McNair** *(retired)*

It's just a matter of the offense catching up to the defense. But can it happen before veterans like Lewis, Pryce and Rolle run out of gas at the end of this season?

OFFENSE

The Ravens have a new offensive coordinator in Cam Cameron. He'll use the West Coast offense, but look for the Ravens to attack more than most teams that use this style. The emphasis will be on ball control, but the Ravens will also use a lot of no-huddle sets. Baltimore doesn't have a lot of downfield threats, but tight end Todd Heap could have a big year in this offense.

Quarterbacks » More than usual, Baltimore's success will be determined by the quarterback play. The Ravens are in no rush to start Flacco, so it looks like Kyle Boller will be the signal-caller until it's time for Flacco to take over.

Boller has good arm strength and has been around the league for five years. He is as physically tough as any quarterback in the league but lacks leadership skills and has trouble reading defenses inside the red zone. Boller does, however, possess the tools to keep his team in games.

Second-year player Troy Smith will probably start off as the backup. Smith has charisma and the confidence of his teammates. He started two games at the end of last season and turned in steady performances. He can make plays outside the pocket with his legs, and is accurate.

Smith, though, tries to force passes. Because of his height, the Ravens have to use more rollouts so he can see over his offensive line.

Flacco, who has all the tools, is the team's quarterback of the future. Flacco has good size, great arm strength and leadership ability. But he played at Division I-AA Delaware, and there are questions about him making the leap to the NFL. There are also questions about his foot speed and whether he can operate under center after playing in the shotgun formation so often in college. Regardless, the Ravens believe he is the answer to their longstanding problem at quarterback. **GRADE: C-**

Running backs » Last year, Willis McGahee became the multipurpose back the Ravens desperately needed. Besides being able to break a long one occasionally, he was effective running inside for tough yards and became a weapon out of the backfield as a receiver.

McGahee stayed relatively injury-free in 2007, but the Ravens can't count on that this season. They have an unproven backup in Ray Rice, the team's second-round pick out of Rutgers. Their styles should complement each other. McGahee is more of a slasher, while Rice runs more north and south. Rice has a lower center of gravity and runs with power.

The Ravens have talent and depth at the fullback position. Starter Le'Ron McClain is coming off a strong rookie season, playing well as both a runner and lead blocker. He also became better as a pass catcher late in the season.

Justin Green lost his job to McClain early last year, but he knows the position well and is the perfect stopgap replacement. **GRADE: C+**

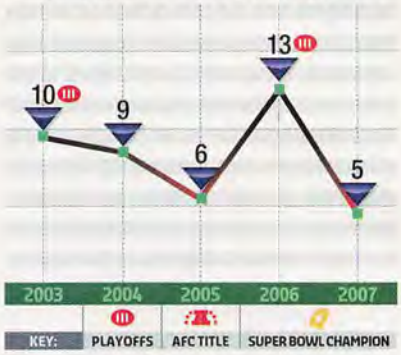
Receivers » The Ravens lack a bona fide No. 1 receiver who can challenge defenses vertically or force the opposition to game-plan for him.

As a group, they are a collection of possession receivers, with the exception of tight end Heap. Veteran Derrick Mason is effective in the slot, especially in the red zone. Fellow wideout Mark Clayton has good hands but needs to be more aggressive in gaining yards after the catch.

Third-year player Demetrius Williams will be the No. 3 receiver. He has good hands and a lot of speed. He could develop into the vertical threat this team needs, but he has to stay healthy. Williams could become the key for the passing game.

Heap, if healthy, will be the top receiver in the offense. The Ravens will move him around to the inside, outside or slot and try to create mismatches.

5-YEAR WINS TREND



NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	302.0	22
RUSHING	112.3	16
PASSING	189.7	23
SCORING	275	24
PUNT RETURNS	9.7	9
KICK RETURNS	23.5	10
RED ZONE TD %	42.2	27
TOTAL DEFENSE	301.6	6
AGAINST RUSH	79.3	2
AGAINST PASS	222.3	20
POINTS ALLOWED	384	22t
INTERCEPTIONS	17	14t
SACKS	32	19t
TURNOVER DIFF.	-17	32

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

	OFFENSE	
QB	Kyle Boller	Troy Smith
FB	Le'Ron McClain	Justin Green
RB	Willis McGahee	Ray Rice
WR	Derrick Mason	Demetrius Williams
WR	Mark Clayton	Yamon Figurs
TE	Todd Heap	Quinn Sypniewski
LT	Jonathan Ogden	Jared Gaither
LG	Jason Brown	Oniel Cousins
C	Chris Chester	Jason Brown
RG	Ben Grubbs	Oniel Cousins
RT	Marshal Yanda	Adam Terry

	DEFENSE	
LE	Trevor Pryce	Dwan Edwards
NT	Kelly Gregg	Justin Bannan
RE	Haloti Ngata	Dwan Edwards
OLB	Jarret Johnson	Antwan Barnes
ILB	Ray Lewis	Prescott Burgess
ILB	Bart Scott	Brendon Ayanbadejo
OLB	Terrell Suggs	Tavares Gooden
LCB	Chris McAlister	Corey Ivy
SS	Dawan Landry	Tom Zbikowski
FS	Ed Reed	Jamiane Winborne
RCB	Samari Rolle	Fabian Washington

	SPECIALISTS	
K	Matt Stover	
P	Sam Koch	
KR	Yamon Figurs	
PR	Yamon Figurs	
LS	Matt Katula	

FANTASY SPIN

http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football

HEAP BOLLER WILLIAMS

Willis McGahee had his best season as a complete running and receiving back in '07, and you can bet that the addition of offensive guru Cam Cameron will help him keep the momentum going.

$ BUY » Todd Heap, TE

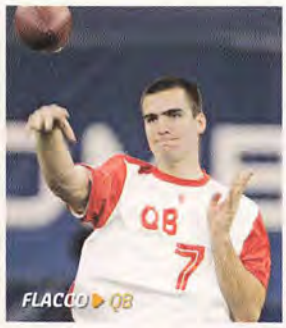
SELL » Kyle Boller, QB

Z SLEEPER » Demetrius Williams, WR

HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL

DRAFT REPORT GRADE ▸ B-

By trading up into the middle of the first round, the Ravens made it clear that they view QB **Joe Flacco** as an elite prospect. Flacco has, without question, the strongest arm in the draft class, and he can consistently make all the throws like few in the league. But to take advantage of his arm strength, Flacco must greatly improve his footwork. Gifted RB **Ray Rice** will prove an excellent pick after he spends a few years behind Willis McGahee, adding 20 pounds of muscle in preparation for the feature role. **Tavares Gooden** made for a fine third-round selection, as he possesses the athleticism, instincts and speed to make plays as a middle or weakside linebacker. Safety **Tom Zbikowski** was a reach 13 picks later, however, as he does not project as a future starter. He does have what it takes to become a reliable backup and effective punt returner. Offensive lineman **Oniel Cousins** is a top-notch athlete who must prove he can handle the mental aspect of the NFL to develop into anything more than a backup. **Marcus Smith** and **Justin Harper** are tall receivers with good athleticism, but both must catch the ball more consistently and learn to translate their timed speed to the playing field. **David Hale** is a tough and highly competitive offensive lineman whose passion and toughness could propel him ahead of Cousins in the long run. Safety **Haruki Nakamura** will be a good special-teams player right off the bat and seems likely to develop into a steady backup. Running back **Allen Patrick** has great quickness, but his slight frame might prevent him from making the team.


FLACCO ▸ QB

2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
1	18	Flacco, Joe	QB	6-6	230	Delaware
2	24	Rice, Ray	RB	5-9	205	Rutgers
3	8	Gooden, Tavares	LB	6-2	238	Miami (FL)
3	23	Zbikowski, Tom	S	6-0	207	Notre Dame
3	36	Cousins, Oniel	G	6-5	300	UTEP
4	7	Smith, Marcus	WR	6-2	212	New Mexico
4	34	Hale, David	T	6-6	308	Weber State
6	40	Nakamura, Haruki	S	5-10	190	Cincinnati
7	8	Harper, Justin	WR	6-4	214	Virginia Tech
7	33	Patrick, Allen	RB	6-1	198	Oklahoma

Heap has good hands and runs crisp routes. He might end up being the Ravens' top vertical threat. **GRADE: C+**

Offensive line The Ravens have potential here but might be a year away from reaching it. This group, which has a lot of inexperience, could begin to prosper at the end of the season.

The Ravens have two veterans in left guard Jason Brown and left tackle Jonathan Ogden. Ogden, entering his 13th season, is still one of the best tackles in the league, while Brown has Pro Bowl potential.

Adam Terry has yet to prove he can become a solid starter in the league, but he'll challenge second-year player Marshal Yanda for the starting job at right tackle.

The Ravens' strength should be up the middle with Brown, second-year right guard Ben Grubbs and third-year center Chris Chester. Both Brown and Grubbs are agile and powerful run blockers.

The Ravens will have trouble handling pass rushers off the corners one-on-one. Cameron will have to find ways to get his right tackles help in passing situations.

Run blocking should be this unit's forte. The Ravens have decent depth in backup tackle Jared Gaither, and Yanda can play either guard or tackle. **GRADE: C**

DEFENSE

The Ravens retained coordinator Rex Ryan from the Brian Billick regime, so the philosophy won't change. Ryan loves to get after quarterbacks. As a result, the Ravens will continue to blitz a lot. Ryan doesn't just blitz linebackers, but safeties and cornerbacks as well. He wants aggressive cornerbacks because they are often left

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE *(an opponent breaks down the Ravens)*

"Of course, I like their defensive intensity, and that has been the mainstay of this franchise for the last nine years. It starts with Mr. Ray Lewis, Ed Reed and Trevor Pryce. And I think it's going to be that way for a long time to come. But that's the only thing I like about this team. I don't even like their uniforms. I can't take any more of their 9-6, 10-7 games.

"They don't have the same kind of guys on defense that they have on offense. They don't have nasty guys on offense, guys with attitude. The Ravens need to change that balance; they have to change the culture of their football team. They have to find the right chemistry between offense and defense. ...

"They had the right leadership in Steve McNair last year, but he was only a shell of himself. But at least he gave them a blueprint for finding a quarterback. It's not going to be easy for the Ravens to change their makeup. It's going to take a while, maybe three years, to develop the type of culture I'm talking about. With McNair gone, the Ravens have entered the rebuilding phrase."

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1	Cincinnati	SEPT. 7	1:00
WEEK 2	@ Houston	SEPT. 14	4:15
WEEK 3	Cleveland	SEPT. 21	4:15
WEEK 4	@ Pittsburgh	SEPT. 29	8:30
WEEK 5	Tennessee	OCT. 5	1:00
WEEK 6	@ Indianapolis	OCT. 12	1:00
WEEK 7	@ Miami	OCT. 19	1:00
WEEK 8	Oakland	OCT. 26	1:00
WEEK 9	@ Cleveland	NOV. 2	1:00
WEEK 10	OPEN DATE		
WEEK 11	@ New York Giants	NOV. 16	1:00
WEEK 12	Philadelphia	NOV. 23	1:00
WEEK 13	@ Cincinnati	NOV. 30	1:00
WEEK 14	Washington	DEC. 7	1:00
WEEK 15	Pittsburgh	DEC. 14	1:00
WEEK 16	@ Dallas	DEC. 20	8:15
WEEK 17	Jacksonville	DEC. 28	1:00

W — L — SCORE

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

MICHAEL CONROY / AP WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

in one-on-one coverage. Baltimore relies on having two big tackles up front to tie up offensive linemen, which allows its small, quick linebackers to run from sideline to sideline.

Defensive line The Ravens have one of the best defensive lines in the league, especially at the tackle positions with Haloti Ngata and nose man Kelly Gregg.

Both are excellent run stoppers. Ngata relies more on quickness and power. He can get in the backfield and disrupt plays. There are few teams that can block Ngata with just one man, and this could be the year he becomes a great pass rusher.

Gregg is dependent on leverage and positioning. He is exceptionally strong and uses his hands well. He'll come off the field in pass-rushing situations. The Ravens have one solid backup at the position in Justin Bannan, but they could use one more in the rotation. Bannan is similar to Gregg and has just as strong of a motor.

At end, Pryce is trying to rebound from an injury-plagued 2007 campaign. Because of multiple health issues, he missed 11 games. The Ravens missed his pass-rushing abilities. Pryce had also become a leader on the team.

The Ravens have solid depth here with versatile Dwan Edwards. He isn't spectacular, but he is steady. He is the perfect stopgap player for three or four games. **GRADE: A+**

Linebackers This could be the last year the starting group is together, as three of the four are in the final years of their contracts.

The Ravens are solid inside. Lewis can still run across the field to make tackles, even though his impact plays have declined in recent seasons. Joining Lewis on the inside is Bart Scott, who is unselfish and willing to throw his body around so Lewis can make tackles.

Look for the Ravens to use Scott more as a blitzing linebacker this season compared to a year ago, when he was forced to drop into coverage because of the departure of outside linebacker Adalius Thomas.

Terrell Suggs will start on the outside and has to prove he is still one of the best pass rushers in the game after struggling last season. Suggs has quickness, speed and surprising strength.

Jarret Johnson was solid on the outside last season, his first as a starter. Johnson isn't flashy, but he's very steady and detailed in his approach to the game.

Look for the Ravens to work some of their younger linebackers onto the field. Second-year player Antwan Barnes will probably sub for Johnson in passing situations, while fellow sophomore Prescott Burgess will get time behind Lewis and Scott. Look for the Ravens to get Lewis off the field more compared to year ago in passing situations.

Also, keep an eye on rookie linebacker Tavares Gooden out of Miami. He is small but plays with the same tenacity as Lewis. **GRADE: A**

THE BOOK ON ... CHRIS McALISTER *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"When Chris first came into the league, he had great talent but virtually no discipline. He let off-the-field issues get in the way of his training and his performances on Sunday afternoons. He has matured now, both personally and professionally. As a player, he is one of the best cornerbacks in the league because he can play in any scheme. He has great speed and size, so he can play press coverage, which they do a lot of in Baltimore. He is smart and intelligent enough to sit and handle a zone. When at the top of his game, there are few receivers that can beat McAlister. ...

"You can frustrate him. When he gives up a big play, he comes unraveled at times. If you can get him talking a lot, he'll concentrate less. Double moves work on Chris because he is so aggressive that he likes to bite on the first move. He'll occasionally get caught peeking in the backfield and give up a big play. On a good day, he's one of the toughest competitors in the league."

RAVENS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1 Ray Lewis *(1996-present)*

Possibly the best and most complete middle linebacker in NFL history; Lewis has amassed every honor imaginable, including Super Bowl MVP.

2 Jamie Sharper *(1997-2001)*

An integral cog in Baltimore's defensive machine who forced five fumbles during the team's historic 2000 season.

3 Peter Boulware *(1997-2005)*

Posted double-digit sack totals three times and finished with a franchise-record 70.

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/10	L	20-27	at Cincinnati Bengals
09/16	W	20-13	New York Jets
09/23	W	26-23	Arizona Cardinals
09/30	L	13-27	at Cleveland Browns
10/07	W	9-7	at San Francisco 49ers
10/14	W	22-3	St. Louis Rams
10/21	L	14-19	at Buffalo Bills
11/05	L	7-38	at Pittsburgh Steelers
11/11	L	7-21	Cincinnati Bengals
11/18	L	30-33	Cleveland Browns
11/25	L	14-32	at San Diego Chargers
12/03	L	24-27	New England Patriots
12/09	L	20-44	Indianapolis Colts
12/16	L	16-22	at Miami Dolphins
12/23	L	6-27	at Seattle Seahawks
12/30	W	27-21	Pittsburgh Steelers

WON 5, LOST 11

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
McGahee	294	1207	4.1	46t	7
Smith	75	264	3.5	24	2
Boller	19	89	4.7	15	0
Ross	12	72	6.0	32t	1
Anderson	15	62	4.1	16	0
Smith	12	54	4.5	14	1
McNair	10	32	3.2	13	0
McClain	8	18	2.3	4	0
Figurs	1	-1	-1.0	-1	0
RAVENS	**446**	**1797**	**4**	**46t**	**11**
OPPONENTS	446	1268	2.8	36	9

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Mason	103	1087	10.6	79t	5
Clayton	48	531	11.1	52	0
McGahee	43	231	5.4	30	1
Sypniewski	34	246	7.2	13	1
Smith	27	192	7.1	29	0
Heap	23	239	10.4	37	1
Williams	20	290	14.5	34	0
Darling	18	326	18.1	53	3
McClain	9	55	6.1	13t	1
Wilcox	6	18	3.0	7	1
Anderson	4	26	6.5	10	0
Green	2	16	8.0	10	0
Vickers	2	4	2.0	5	0
Figurs	1	36	36.0	36	0
Willis	1	11	11.0	11	0
RAVENS	**341**	**3308**	**9.7**	**79t**	**13**
OPPONENTS	293	3740	12.8	78t	27

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Boller	275	168	1743	9	10
McNair	205	133	1113	2	4
Smith	76	40	452	2	0
Clayton	1	0	0	0	0
RAVENS	**557**	**341**	**3308**	**13**	**14**
OPPONENTS	490	293	3740	27	17

SACKS RAVENS 32, OPPONENTS 39

Suggs 5, Gregg 3, Ivy 3, Ngata 3, Bannan 2, Barnes 2, Johnson 2, Lewis 2, Pryce 2, Sapp 2, Edwards 1, Jones 1, Landry 1, Scott 1, Stills 1

WALTER DIXON / ICON SMI

RAY LEWIS ▶ LB

DAVID DUROCHIK FOR SN

Secondary The Ravens have two starting cornerbacks over the age of 30, and both Rolle and McAlister missed extensive playing time a year ago because of injuries.

McAlister lost eight games last season to knee problems, and has to prove he has rebounded from offseason surgery. Rolle missed 10 contests while dealing with seizures from epilepsy. They played well when they were in the lineup, but no one really knows if age has caught up with them. Both specialize in press coverage, even though McAlister is the more complete and physical of the two.

Ed Reed returns at free safety, and the Ravens want him to cut down on some of the gambling that led to several big plays last season. Reed is a dominant player when he stays within the scheme because he has great range, and he is one of the team's better tacklers.

Starting next to Reed is strong safety Dawan Landry, who is solid against the run but struggles in pass coverage. Landry has to rebound after a below-average performance a year ago.

The Ravens need to find some depth in the secondary. They traded a draft pick to the Raiders for fourth-year cornerback Fabian Washington, and he might be their answer at the nickel spot simply by default.

When healthy, however, this group can dominate. **GRADE: B**

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Ravens have one of the league's top kicking games with placekicker Matt Stover and punter Sam Koch.

Stover is one of the most reliable kickers in the history of the league. Last year he converted on 27 of 32 field goals, and he is fourth on the NFL's all-time scoring list with 1,822 points.

Koch punted 78 times last season for a career-high 43.6-yard average, including a career long of 64 yards. He also placed 20 kicks inside the 20-yard line.

The Ravens have Yamon Figurs to return punts and kicks, but he is inconsistent. Figurs has great speed and can be a game-changer, but he has trouble holding on to the ball and loses confidence quickly.

Baltimore used Reed to return punts at times last season to get a spark, but that probably won't happen in 2008. The Ravens will start out using Figurs, but they may give rookie running back Allen Patrick a shot if he falters. **GRADE: B-**

BOTTOM LINE

The Ravens don't want to admit it but they are in a rebuilding phase. They have a lot of talent on defense, as usual, but are also undergoing a major transition on offense. If they can get some production out of their quarterbacks and stay healthy, then a .500 finish is possible.

With an influx of young talent, however, the Ravens seem to have a bright future, and might be ready to make a serious run in a year or two.

79

FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT

DOWN

ROSTER

#	QUARTERBACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
7	Boller, Kyle	QB	6-3	220	06/17/1981	5	California
10	Smith, Troy	QB	6-0	225	07/20/1984	1	Ohio State

#	OFFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
60	Brown, Jason	G	6-3	320	05/05/1983	3	North Carolina
65	Chester, Chris	G	6-3	305	01/12/1983	2	Oklahoma
71	Gaither, Jared	T	6-9	350	03/18/1986	1	Maryland
66	Grubbs, Ben	G	6-3	315	03/10/1984	1	Auburn
70	Katula, Matt	C	6-6	272	08/22/1982	3	Wisconsin
74	Kracalik, Mike	T	6-8	337	09/09/1982	2	San Diego State
75	Ogden, Jonathan	T	6-9	345	07/31/1974	12	UCLA
78	Terry, Adam	T	6-8	330	09/01/1982	3	Syracuse
73	Yanda, Marshal	G	6-4	310	09/15/1984	1	Iowa

#	RUNNING BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
30	Daniels, P.J.	RB	5-10	214	12/21/1982	0	Georgia Tech
33	Green, Justin	RB	5-11	251	04/30/1982	3	Montana
37	McClain, Le'Ron	RB	6-0	260	12/27/1984	1	Alabama
23	McGahee, Willis	RB	6-0	232	10/21/1981	4	Miami (FL)
44	Nordin, Jake	RB	6-3	255	07/08/1984	1	Northern Illinois
34	Ross, Cory	RB	5-6	201	09/22/1982	2	Nebraska

#	RECEIVERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
89	Clayton, Mark	WR	5-10	195	07/02/1982	3	Oklahoma
16	Figurs, Yamon	WR	5-11	175	01/10/1982	1	Kansas State
86	Heap, Todd	TE	6-5	252	03/16/1980	7	Arizona State
85	Mason, Derrick	WR	5-10	192	01/17/1974	11	Michigan State
18	Reed, Kerry	WR	6-1	200	12/24/1984	1	Michigan State
88	Sypniewski, Quinn	TE	6-6	270	04/14/1982	2	Colorado
80	Vickers, Lee	TE	6-6	275	03/13/1981	1	North Alabama
83	Wilcox, Daniel	TE	6-1	245	03/23/1977	6	Appalachian State
87	Williams, Demetrius	WR	6-2	197	03/28/1983	2	Oregon
17	Willis, Matt	WR	6-0	195	04/13/1984	1	UCLA

#	DEFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
94	Bannan, Justin	DT	6-3	310	04/18/1979	6	Colorado
93	Edwards, Dwan	DT	6-3	315	05/16/1981	4	Oregon State
98	Fitch, Zarnell	DT	6-3	320	07/06/1983	0	TCU
63	Gordon, Amon	DT	6-2	305	10/13/1981	2	Stanford
97	Gregg, Kelly	DT	6-0	310	11/01/1976	8	Oklahoma
95	Johnson, Jarret	DE	6-3	270	08/14/1981	5	Alabama
92	Ngata, Haloti	DT	6-4	340	01/21/1984	2	Oregon
69	Parker, J'Vonne	DT	6-4	323	06/07/1982	2	Rutgers
90	Pryce, Trevor	DT	6-5	286	08/03/1975	11	Clemson

#	DEFENSIVE BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
35	Ivy, Corey	CB	5-9	188	03/29/1977	7	Oklahoma
26	Landry, Dawan	S	6-0	220	12/30/1982	2	Georgia Tech
36	Leonhard, Jim	S	5-8	185	10/27/1982	4	Wisconsin
29	Martin, Derrick	CB	5-10	202	05/16/1985	2	Wyoming
21	McAlister, Chris	CB	6-1	206	06/14/1977	9	Arizona
24	Pittman, David	CB	5-11	182	10/14/1983	1	Northwestern State
27	Prude, Ronnie	CB	5-11	178	06/04/1982	2	LSU
20	Reed, Ed	S	5-11	200	09/11/1978	6	Miami (FL)
22	Rolle, Samari	CB	6-0	175	08/10/1976	10	Florida State
41	Walker, Frank	CB	5-11	196	08/06/1981	5	Tuskegee
31	Washington, Fabian	CB	5-11	185	06/09/1983	3	Nebraska
28	Winborne, Jamaine	CB	5-10	202	12/26/1980	2	Virginia

#	LINEBACKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
96	Ayanbadejo, Brendon	LB	6-1	228	09/06/1976	5	UCLA
50	Barnes, Antwan	LB	6-1	240	10/19/1984	1	Florida International
54	Burgess, Prescott	LB	6-3	240	03/06/1984	1	Michigan
53	Cody, Dan	LB	6-5	255	12/01/1981	1	Oklahoma
59	Greisen, Nick	LB	6-1	244	08/10/1979	6	Wisconsin
91	Jones, Edgar	LB	6-3	263	12/01/1984	1	Southeast Missouri St.
52	Lewis, Ray	LB	6-1	250	05/15/1975	12	Miami (FL)
58	McCune, Robert	LB	6-0	240	03/09/1979	2	Louisville
57	Scott, Bart	LB	6-2	240	08/18/1980	6	Southern Illinois
51	Smith, Mike	LB	6-1	235	09/02/1981	2	Texas Tech
56	Stills, Gary	LB	6-2	250	07/11/1974	9	West Virginia
55	Suggs, Terrell	LB	6-3	260	10/11/1982	5	Arizona State

#	KICKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
4	Koch, Sam	P	6-1	230	08/13/1982	2	Nebraska
3	Stover, Matt	K	5-11	178	01/27/1968	17	Louisiana Tech

▶ **JOHN HARBAUGH,** *Head coach*

Rex Ryan, asst. head coach/def. coord.; **Cam Cameron**, off. coord.; **Jerry Rosburg**, special teams coord.; **Clarence Brooks**, def. line; **Mark Carrier**, def. backs; **Wade Harman**, tight ends; **Jim Hostler**, wide receivers; **Hue Jackson**, quarterbacks; **John Matsko**, off. line; **Greg Mattison**, linebackers; **Andy Moeller**, asst. off. line; **Wilbert Montgomery**, running backs; **Chuck Pagano**, secondary; **Mike Pettine**, outside linebackers

BUFFALO BILLS

After offseason influx of quality free agents, it may be the Bills' time to make a move

By Allen Wilson, *Buffalo News*

The last time the Buffalo Bills made the playoffs, a good portion of their current roster wasn't even old enough to vote. And since this is an election year, it's safe to say that the chance that the Bills will end their eight-year playoff drought is too close to call.

However, they finall seem to have a team capable of making a postseason breakthrough.

The Bills helped their defense by adding three-time Pro Bowl tackle Marcus Stroud in a trade with Jacksonville and drafting Troy cornerback Leodis McKelvin. They also grabbed outside linebacker Kawika Mitchell and tackle Spencer Johnson in free agency. On offense, they got the size they needed at wide receiver with Indiana rookie James Hardy.

Coach Dick Jauron did a great job squeezing out seven wins and staying in the playoff hunt late into the season despite having 17 players end the year on injured reserve. This team should be much improved, which means anything short of a playoff berth will be a disappointment.

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE

(an opponent breaks down the Bills)

"I think Buffalo's a good football team. I've got a lot of respect for Buffalo, for Dick (Jauron), their players and the effort they play with. They had a lot of injuries last year, and they still were very competitive.

"That's a tribute to Dick and his staff for getting the most out of the players they have. They're a team that kind of makes you work for everything. They don't make many mistakes. They make you beat them.

"They do a good job defensively of giving you a number of different looks with their coverages, pressures and use of personnel. Their offense struggled a little bit last year, but they have a lot of potential. I really like the (Marshawn) Lynch kid. He is a physical runner and he has a big offensive line in front of him. He's the key to that offense, so if you can slow him down you can limit what they do on offense.

"Their quarterback still has a lot to learn, but he's a guy who should get better the more he plays. Their special teams are as good as there is in this league. I don't know if this is a playoff team, but they will definitely be in the hunt if they stay healthy."

BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

JOHN McCARGO ▸ DT

McCargo showed glimpses of why the Bills made him a 2006 first-round draft pick last year. He has good physical tools. He'll start for the first time this season and, with Marcus Stroud playing next him, McCargo could emerge as the disruptive force the team envisioned.

MARSHAWN LYNCH ▶ RB

ONLINE

www.sportingnews.com/nfl/teams/bills
www.buffalobills.com

2007 RECORD

OVERALL: 7-9 ▶ HOME: 4-4

STADIUM

RALPH WILSON STADIUM
Capacity: 73,967
Turf: Artificial Tickets: 877-BB-TICKS
Training Camp: St. John Fisher College,
Pittsford, N.Y.; 585-218-7500

SN PICK

3
AFC EAST
(5-11)

(OPPOSITE): ICON SMI; LUC LECLERC / US PRESSWIRE

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 Seattle — SEPT. 7 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 2 @ Jacksonville — SEPT. 14 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 3 Oakland — SEPT. 21 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 4 @ St. Louis — SEPT. 28 | 4:05 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 5 @ Arizona — OCT. 5 | 4:15 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 6 *OPEN DATE*

WEEK 7 San Diego — OCT. 19 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 8 @ Miami — OCT. 26 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 9 New York Jets — NOV. 2 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 10 @ New England — NOV. 9 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 11 Cleveland — NOV. 17 | 8:30 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 12 @ Kansas City — NOV. 23 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 13 San Francisco — NOV. 30 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 14 Miami *(in Toronto)* — DEC. 7 | 4:05 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 15 @ New York Jets — DEC. 14 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 16 @ Denver — DEC. 21 | 4:05 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 17 New England — DEC. 28 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

THE BOOK ON ... AARON SCHOBEL *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"Schobel has kind of grown on me the last three years. He has always been a high-motor guy who will play from whistle to whistle, but he has gotten better in every aspect of the game and is growing into a complete player. Obviously, his pass-rushing skills get most of the attention. He is a handful because he gets off the ball so quickly that you have to give the tackle help or at least chip him with a (running) back to slow him down. The best way to neutralize him or slow down his aggressiveness is run at him on sweeps and counters. He is good at shooting gaps, but if you get a bigger body on him you could have some success. However, this guy is a challenge no matter what you try to do. He's the one guy on that team you have to game-plan for on their defense."

OFFENSE

New offensive coordinator Turk Schonert takes over for Steve Fairchild, who left to become head coach at Colorado State. Schonert is in charge of retooling an attack that ranked 30th in total yards, passing, third downs and red-zone touchdown percentage. The running game will remain the focal point, but look for a passing attack with quick, rhythm throws that takes plenty of shots downfield. The Bills also want to get the tight end and running backs more involved as receivers.

Quarterbacks Trent Edwards was a revelation as a rookie last season. He was the sixth quarterback drafted in 2007, but was by far the most productive. Edwards is a smart signal-caller who makes sound decisions and gets rid of the ball quickly and with good accuracy. He doesn't have a big arm, but Edwards spent much of the offseason building up his strength to be able to make all the throws. He's not a big running threat, but has decent mobility. He still has a lot to learn about reading coverages and must avoid locking on to receivers. But he works at his craft and might end the team's long search for a franchise quarterback.

The Bills thought that guy would be J.P. Losman, but injuries and poor play allowed Edwards to steal his job. Losman has great physical tools—a rifle-like arm and outstanding mobility—but he has a knack for making poor decisions at crucial moments. He forces some throws into coverage and takes more sacks than he should by holding the ball too long. Losman had hoped to be traded in the offseason, but the Bills thought it was more prudent to keep him for one more year as veteran insurance. **GRADE: C**

Running backs Last season, Marshawn Lynch was everything the Bills were looking for: a big work-horse back to build an offense around. Lynch (1,115 yards and 7 TDs as a rookie) is a load to bring down because of his powerful build and physical running style. He breaks a lot of tackles, rarely gets stopped on first contact and always fights for every yard. Lynch is a prototypical downhill runner who loves to pound the ball between the tackles. However, he's more than a ball-control weapon. He has the speed to turn the corner and take it the distance. He was underused as a receiver last season, which should change under Schonert. Lynch has good hands and runs surprisingly smooth routes. He did have trouble picking up blitzes at times as a rookie, but if he cleans up his act in that area, he'll be a complete back for years to come. Fred Jackson was a big surprise last season. He's an all-purpose threat with good speed and vision as a runner and has good hands as a receiver. He's not a great blocker, but he's trying to improve in that area. His darting style is a nice change of pace to Lynch's power running. **GRADE: B**

Receivers After a breakout 2006, wide receiver Lee Evans took a step back last season. He caught 27 fewer passes and gained 443 less yards than the previous year. Some of his drop-off was due to the unstable quarterback position. Some of it was the play-calling.

5-YEAR WINS TREND

NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	277.1	30
RUSHING	112.5	15
PASSING	164.6	30
SCORING	252	30
PUNT RETURNS	15.4	1
KICK RETURNS	20.7	28
RED ZONE TD %	38.2	30
TOTAL DEFENSE	362.9	31
AGAINST RUSH	124.6	25
AGAINST PASS	238.4	29
POINTS ALLOWED	354	18
INTERCEPTIONS	18	10t
SACKS	26	29
TURNOVER DIFF.	+9	6t

JEFF FISHBEIN / GETTY IMAGES

But Evans should thrive in a new system designed to get him open more often. Evans is a true deep threat with blazing speed. He's a matchup nightmare in man coverage because he gets separation by running good routes, changes tempo expertly and gets in and out of his breaks quickly. He's not a great blocker but is willing to mix it up. This is Evans' contract year, so expect a return to 2006 form.

Second-round draft pick Hardy gives the Bills the big receiver they've lacked since Eric Moulds departed three years ago. The 6-7, 220-pound rookie has the size to create matchup problems.

Slot receiver Josh Reed is a solid possession receiver with good hands who has running-back skills after the catch. Fellow slot receiver Roscoe Parrish has great short-area quickness and the ability to stretch the field vertically. With Evans and Hardy outside and Reed and Parrish in the slot, the Bills should have a potent attack in their four-receiver sets.

Because tight end Robert Royal is a stronger run blocker than receiver, the Bills signed free agents Teyo Johnson and Courtney Anderson and drafted Derek Fine of Kansas in the fourth round with hopes of finding a pass catcher who can stretch the middle of the field. **GRADE: C+**

Offensive line » The Bills finally addressed this position last season, and it paid huge dividends. Left tackle Jason Peters made his first Pro Bowl and established himself as one of the dominant linemen in the league. The former tight end is a tremendous athlete with great footwork and agility. He uses his quickness and long arms to keep defenders at bay and has the size and strength to be overpowering in the run game. Left guard Derrick Dockery was solid in his first year with the team. He's a 6-6, 330-pound road-grating run blocker and anchors well against bull rushers.

Right tackle Langston Walker disproved all the negative reviews from his previous home in Oakland. A mountainous player (6-8, 366 pounds), Walker is a physical run blocker. While he struggles against pass rushers with speed, he can be an exceptional pass protector when he keeps his feet apart and stays balanced. Right guard Brad Butler is another big guy who moves very well for his size. He has trouble with power rushers but is a technical run blocker.

Center Melvin Fowler is a little undersized, and it shows when he has trouble anchoring against big, physical nose tackles. But he's very smart, athletic and has a nice feel for the game.

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		
QB	Trent Edwards	J.P. Losman
FB	Darian Barnes	Jonathan Evans
RB	Marshawn Lynch	Fred Jackson
WR	Lee Evans	Roscoe Parrish
WR	James Hardy	Josh Reed
TE	Robert Royal	Teyo Johnson
LT	Jason Peters	Kirk Chambers
LG	Derrick Dockery	Duke Preston
C	Melvin Fowler	Jason Whittle
RG	Brad Butler	Jason Whittle
RT	Langston Walker	Kirk Chambers
DEFENSE		
LE	Chris Kelsay	Ryan Denney
LT	John McCargo	Spencer Johnson
NT	Marcus Stroud	Kyle Williams
RE	Aaron Schobel	Chris Ellis
SLB	Angelo Crowell	Blake Costanzo
MLB	Paul Posluszny	John DiGiorgio
WLB	Kawika Mitchell	Keith Ellison
LCB	Leodis McKelvin	Will James
RCB	Terrence McGee	Jabari Greer
SS	Donte Whitner	Bryan Scott
FS	Ko Simpson	George Wilson
SPECIALISTS		
K	Rian Lindell	
P	Brian Moorman	
KR	Roscoe Parrish	
PR	Terrence McGee	
LS	Ryan Neill	

LUC LECLERC / US PRESSWIRE

BILLS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1 **Cornelius Bennett** *(1987-95)*

The five-time Pro Bowler's speed and athleticism made him stand apart from the rest. Bennett was a first-team All-Pro in 1988.

2 **Darryl Talley** *(1983-94)*

Tough, physical and the consummate leader, Talley started 18 playoff games and made two Pro Bowls.

3 **Mike Stratton** *(1962-72)*

Stratton was the heart of a defense that helped lead the Bills to AFL titles in 1964 and 1965. He made first-team All-Pro from 1964-66.

» DRAFT REPORT GRADE ▸ B-

The Bills grabbed tough and athletic CB **Leodis McKelvin** in the first round, and he should start as a rookie. The small-school player must adjust to the jump in competition but has the physical and mental tools to excel. **James Hardy** is a big, gifted wide receiver who could prove a nice complement to Lee Evans. But first he has to show that his off-field issues are behind him. Like many of Buffalo's defensive ends, **Chris Ellis** has quick feet and plays with intensity. He should contribute right away as a rush specialist. Cornerback **Reggie Corner** was a reach in the fourth round but has the quickness and athleticism to become a solid backup and special teams contributor. Tight end **Derek Fine** is a smart receiver who gets open consistently and has excellent hands, but his lack of speed and explosiveness will limit him to a backup role. Linebacker **Alvin Bowen** was a great value pick in the fifth round and has all the tools to start down the road. Running back **Xavier Omon** has tremendous upside for a sixth-round pick due to his combination of size, speed and power. But his fundamentals need work. In the seventh round, the Bills grabbed two players who should contribute and one who could become special. **Steve Johnson** is a sure-handed receiver who runs good routes and will develop into a reliable backup. **Kennard Cox** has the talent to fill in at corner and help out on special teams. Offensive tackle **Demetrius Bell**, meanwhile, has the chance to shine once he learns the nuances of the game. He played football for the first time in 2005.

» 2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
1	11	McKelvin, Leodis	CB	5-11	190	Troy
2	10	Hardy, James	WR	6-7	220	Indiana
3	9	Ellis, Chris	DE	6-5	267	Virginia Tech
4	15	Corner, Reggie	CB	5-9	175	Akron
4	33	Fine, Derek	TE	6-3	245	Kansas
5	12	Bowen, Alvin	LB	6-2	216	Iowa State
6	13	Omon, Xavier	RB	5-11	220	Northwest Missouri St.
7	12	Bell, Demetrius	T	6-6	263	Northwestern State
7	17	Johnson, Steve	WR	6-2	210	Kentucky
7	44	Cox, Kennard	CB	6-1	195	Pittsburgh

McKELVIN ▸ CB

ROSTER

#	QUARTERBACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
5	Edwards, Trent	QB	6-4	231	10/30/1983	1	Stanford
10	Hamdan, Gibran	QB	6-4	220	02/08/1981	1	Indiana
7	Losman, J.P.	QB	6-2	212	03/12/1981	4	Tulane

#	OFFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
60	Butler, Brad	T	6-7	315	09/18/1983	2	Virginia
73	Chambers, Kirk	G	6-7	315	03/19/1979	3	Stanford
66	Dockery, Derrick	G	6-6	330	09/07/1980	5	Texas
79	Estes, Patrick	T	6-7	310	02/04/1983	2	Virginia
67	Fowler, Melvin	C	6-3	310	03/31/1979	6	Maryland
63	Gaddis, Christian	C	6-1	300	10/05/1984	1	Villanova
69	McCaskill, Nevin	T	6-4	292	12/29/1983	0	Hampton
70	Murphy, Matt	T	6-5	264	02/23/1980	6	Maryland
71	Peters, Jason	T	6-4	340	01/22/1982	4	Arkansas
75	Preston, Duke	G	6-5	326	06/12/1982	3	Illinois
68	Walker, Langston	T	6-8	366	09/03/1979	6	California
65	Whittle, Jason	G	6-4	279	03/07/1975	10	Missouri State

#	RUNNING BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
41	Barnes, Darian	RB	6-2	240	02/28/1980	6	Hampton
47	Evans, Jonathan	RB	6-1	245	10/10/1981	0	Baylor
22	Jackson, Fred	RB	6-1	215	02/20/1981	1	Coe
23	Lynch, Marshawn	RB	5-11	215	04/22/1986	1	California
31	Wright, Dwayne	RB	5-11	228	06/02/1983	1	Fresno State

#	RECEIVERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
89	Anderson, Courtney	TE	6-6	270	11/19/1980	4	San Jose State
83	Evans, Lee	WR	5-10	197	03/11/1981	4	Wisconsin
85	Everett, Kevin	TE	6-4	253	02/05/1982	2	Miami (FL)
14	Huggins, Felton	WR	6-2	186	02/15/1983	0	Southeastern La.
17	Jenkins, Justin	WR	6-0	207	12/10/1980	1	Mississippi State
48	Johnson, Teyo	TE	6-6	260	11/29/1981	3	Stanford
88	Massaquoi, Tim	TE	6-5	255	07/08/1982	2	Michigan
19	Mayle, Scott	WR	6-1	175	10/14/1983	0	Ohio
11	Parrish, Roscoe	WR	5-9	171	07/16/1982	3	Miami (FL)
82	Reed, Josh	WR	5-10	210	05/01/1980	6	LSU
84	Royal, Robert	TE	6-4	255	05/15/1978	5	LSU
80	Schouman, Derek	TE	6-2	233	03/11/1985	1	Boise State

#	DEFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
96	Bryan, Copeland	DE	6-4	140	07/14/1983	1	Arizona
92	Denney, Ryan	DE	6-7	264	06/15/1977	6	Brigham Young
98	Jefferson, Jason	DT	6-1	295	12/20/1981	3	Wisconsin
91	Johnson, Spencer	DT	6-3	286	12/12/1981	4	Auburn
90	Kelsay, Chris	DE	6-4	261	10/31/1979	5	Nebraska
74	Mace, Corey	DE	6-3	287	12/22/1985	0	Wyoming
97	McCargo, John	DT	6-2	307	08/19/1983	2	North Carolina State
72	Neill, Ryan	DE	6-3	253	12/12/1982	1	Rutgers
76	Nua, Shaun	DE	6-5	270	05/22/1981	0	Brigham Young
94	Schobel, Aaron	DE	6-4	243	09/01/1977	7	TCU
99	Stroud, Marcus	DT	6-6	306	06/25/1978	7	Georgia
95	Williams, Kyle	DT	6-1	306	06/10/1983	2	LSU

#	DEFENSIVE BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
45	Corto, Jon	S	6-1	195	01/01/1984	0	Sacred Heart
35	Fox, Dustin	CB	5-11	200	10/08/1982	2	Ohio State
33	Greer, Jabari	CB	5-11	180	02/11/1982	4	Tennessee
21	James, Will	CB	6-0	200	06/15/1979	7	Western Illinois
24	McGee, Terrence	CB	5-9	198	10/14/1980	5	Northwestern State
43	Scott, Bryan	S	6-1	219	04/13/1981	5	Penn State
30	Simpson, Ko	S	6-1	202	11/09/1983	2	South Carolina
29	Wendling, John	S	6-1	222	06/04/1983	1	Wyoming
20	Whitner, Donte	S	5-11	208	07/24/1985	2	Ohio State
37	Wilson, George	S	6-0	212	03/14/1981	2	Arkansas
26	Youboty, Ashton	CB	5-11	189	07/07/1984	2	Ohio State

#	LINEBACKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
54	Costanzo, Blake	LB	6-2	235	04/14/1984	1	Lafayette
55	Crowell, Angelo	LB	6-1	243	08/16/1981	5	Virginia
52	DiGiorgio, John	LB	6-2	229	06/29/1983	2	Saginaw Valley
56	Ellison, Keith	LB	6-0	228	02/06/1984	2	Oregon State
55	Mitchell, Kawika	LB	6-1	253	10/10/1979	5	South Florida
51	Posluszny, Paul	LB	6-1	238	10/10/1984	1	Penn State

#	KICKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
9	Lindell, Rian	K	6-3	235	01/20/1977	8	Washington State
8	Moorman, Brian	P	6-0	172	02/05/1976	7	Pittsburg State

▶ **DICK JAURON,** *Head coach*

Turk Schonert, off. coord.; **Perry Fewell**, def. coord.; **Bobby April**, asst. head coach/special teams; **Ray Brown**, asst. off. line; **George Catavolos**, def. backs; **Charlie Coiner**, tight ends, **DeMontie Cross**, asst. linebackers/special teams; **Bill Kollar**, def. line; **Sean Kugler**, off. line; **Matt Sheldon**, linebackers; **Eric Studesville**, running game coord./running backs; **Tyke Tolbert**, wide receivers; **Alex Van Pelt**, quarterbacks

Jason Whittle and Duke Preston are versatile veterans capable of playing either guard spot and center. Kirk Chambers has a decent skill set but needs to add more strength.

GRADE: B

DEFENSE

Coordinator Perry Fewell likes generating pressure with a variety of blitzes and zone dogs. He uses different personnel in his pressure packages and tries to create deception with a lot of pre-snap movement. The Bills don't employ a lot of man coverage, as their secondary usually lines up in a cover-2 shell on pass downs. The Bills struggled against the run last season, but they hope that adding more bulk along the front seven will make them stouter at the point of attack.

Defensive line The Bills have the makings of a very good front four, with Stroud joining ends Aaron Schobel and Chris Kelsay and rising tackle John McCargo. Other free-agent and draft additions should keep the team from having to manufacture a pass rush with extra blitzes.

The Bills' run defense has been getting pushed around for several years, and they hope Stroud will help solve that problem. He is a big space-eater who can stuff the run and is also quick enough to penetrate gaps and disrupt plays in the backfield. He has dealt with a bad ankle the last couple of years but is a gamble worth taking for the Bills. The release of tackle Larry Tripplett opens the door for McCargo to become a starter. McCargo showed flashes of excellence during his second season, displaying good quickness and penetrating ability. Playing next to Stroud should help him.

Schobel is coming off his second straight Pro Bowl year, even though his sack total dropped from 14 in 2007 to 6.5 last season. He faced more double teams because he is a relentless pass rusher. He's underrated against the run and plays with a nonstop motor. Kelsay is tough against the run and has developed into a good bull rusher. **GRADE: B**

Linebackers This unit should be improved with the offseason additions. Luring Mitchell away from the Super Bowl champion Giants was one of the team's major offseason moves. Mitchell brings more size (6-1, 253 pounds) and run-stuffing ability than last year's starter on the outside, Keith Ellison. Mitchell can also play all three linebacker spots, but he will start on the weak side. Ellison and rookie Alvin Bowen

OFFSEASON MOVES

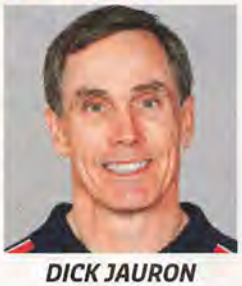
ADDITIONS:

LB **Kawika Mitchell** *(FA/Giants)*, DT **Spencer Johnson** *(FA/Vikings)*, DT **Marcus Stroud** *(trade/Jaguars)*, TE **Courtney Anderson** *(FA/Falcons)*, DB **Will James** *(FA/Eagles)*

SUBTRACTIONS:

WR **Peerless Price** *(FA)*, DB **E.J. Underwood** *(FA)*, LB **Kevin Harrison** *(FA)*, OLB **Coy Wire** *(FA)*, RB **Anthony Thomas** *(FA)*, DB **Jerametrius Butler** *(FA)*, DB **Kiwaukee Thomas** *(FA)*, FS **Jim Leonhard** *(FA/Ravens)*, LB **Josh Stamer** *(FA/Titans)*, DE **Al Wallace** *(FA)*, RB **Shaud Williams** *(FA)*, LB **Mario Haggan** *(FA)*, TE **Michael Gaines** *(FA/Lions)*, LB **Leon Joe** *(FA/Buccaneers)*, WR **Sam Aiken** *(FA/Patriots)*, DB **Jason Webster** *(FA/Patriots)*, TE **Ryan Neufeld** *(FA)*, DT **Larry Tripplett** *(FA/Seahawks)*

INSIDE THE HEADSET



DICK JAURON

Jauron is fairly conservative on offense. While he will take his shots downfield, he prefers a low-risk, ball-control attack that emphasizes the running game. Defensively, he likes to keep offenses guessing by using different looks and trying to break down blocking schemes with blitzes and zone dogs.

HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL

FANTASY SPIN

http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football

LYNCH

ROYAL

EDWARDS

Lee Evans had 303 receiving yards and two touchdowns in Weeks 8 and 9 but averaged just 39 yards with three scores in the other 14 games. He's not a No. 1 fantasy receiver.

$ BUY » Marshawn Lynch, RB

» SELL » Robert Royal, TE

Z SLEEPER » Trent Edwards, QB

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/09	L	14-15	Denver Broncos
09/16	L	3-26	at Pittsburgh Steelers
09/23	L	7-38	at New England Patriots
09/30	W	17-14	New York Jets
10/08	L	24-25	Dallas Cowboys
10/21	W	19-14	Baltimore Ravens
10/28	W	13-3	at New York Jets
11/04	W	33-21	Cincinnati Bengals
11/11	W	13-10	at Miami Dolphins
11/18	L	10-56	New England Patriots
11/25	L	14-36	at Jacksonville Jaguars
12/02	W	17-16	at Washington Redskins
12/09	W	38-17	Miami Dolphins
12/16	L	0-8	at Cleveland Browns
12/23	L	21-38	New York Giants
12/30	L	9-17	at Philadelphia Eagles

WON 7, LOST 9

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Lynch	280	1115	4.0	56t	7
Jackson	58	300	5.2	27	0
Losman	20	110	5.5	17	0
Wright	29	94	3.2	15	0
Thomas	36	89	2.5	9	0
Edwards	14	49	3.5	14	0
Parrish	3	19	6.3	24t	1
Moorman	4	14	3.5	10	0
Reed	4	10	2.5	12	0
BILLS	**448**	**1800**	**4.0**	**56t**	**8**
OPPONENTS	454	1993	4.4	88t	15

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Evans	55	849	15.4	85t	5
Reed	51	578	11.3	30	0
Parrish	35	352	10.1	47t	1
Gaines	25	215	8.6	20	2
Royal	25	248	9.9	28t	3
Jackson	22	190	8.6	54	0
Lynch	18	184	10.2	30	0
Thomas	15	95	6.3	11	1
Price	7	68	9.7	22	0
Schouman	3	19	6.3	10	0
Wright	3	17	5.7	8	0
Neufeld	2	14	7.0	8	0
Aiken	1	10	10.0	10	0
Everett	1	3	3.0	3	0
BILLS	**263**	**2842**	**10.8**	**85t**	**12**
OPPONENTS	354	3958	11.2	59t	19

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Edwards	269	151	1630	7	8
Losman	175	111	1204	4	6
Lynch	1	1	8	1	0
BILLS	**445**	**263**	**2842**	**12**	**14**
OPPONENTS	567	354	3958	19	18

SACKS — **BILLS 26, OPPONENTS 26**

Schobel 6.5, Kelsay 2.5, McCargo 2.5, Crowell 2, DiGiorgio 2, Williams 2, Hargrove 1.5, Denney 1, Ellison 1, Haggan 1, Tripplett 1, Youboty 1

HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL

are both undersized but offer good speed and have the ability to make plays in space.

Middle linebacker Paul Posluszny flashed big-time potential as a sideline-to-sideline playmaker before going down with a broken forearm three games into last season. He is tough, has good awareness and possesses the instincts to diagnose plays quickly and the speed and range to chase down plays. Posluszny's injury allowed the Bills to discover the talents of John DiGiorgio, who displayed good athleticism and a nose for the ball in 2007. The Bills should be set in the middle for a long time.

Strongside linebacker Angelo Crowell became the leader of this unit last season and didn't disappoint. He proved to be a highly productive tackler with good range. **GRADE: C+**

Secondary » This was an area riddled by injuries last season. The Bills should be healthier and deeper here this season.

Buffalo bolstered the cornerback position by drafting Troy's McKelvin in the first round. He has great speed and range. Although his hands aren't always reliable, he knocks down a lot of passes and is not afraid to take chances. It's not a stretch to expect him to be the opening-day starter. Free-agent signee Will James has experience as a starter but is best suited as a nickel back. He also adds some size (6-0, 200) that the Bills have lacked.

Starting cornerback Terrence McGee is not a big risk-taker, but he has good closing speed, is a solid tackler and will fight for balls in the air. Jabari Greer might lose his starting job to McKelvin, but he stood out last season by displaying good instincts, sound techniques and the best ball skills on the team. This will be a make-or-break year for 2006 third-round pick Ashton Youboty, who will have to compete with rookies Reggie Corner and Kennard Cox for playing time.

The Bills are in good shape at safety. Strong safety Donte Whitner plays the position like a linebacker and is a force in run support. He doesn't make a lot of plays in coverage but has the speed to match up with most receivers. Free safety Ko Simpson returns after a season-ending broken ankle. He is smart, rangy and has a knack for making plays. George Wilson was a pleasant surprise in his first season at safety. The former wide receiver displayed impressive range and anticipation skills. Strong safety Bryan Scott proved to be a good pickup early last season. He played a variety of roles and was part of the three-safety package the team used on run downs. **GRADE: B-**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Coach Bobby April has built one of the NFL's elite units. But he lost several free agents who were the core of his coverage and return teams. It will be interesting to see how well he fills those holes. There are no concerns with the kicking game. Punter Brian Moorman wasn't as good as the previous two All-Pro seasons, but he remains one of the league's elite. He helps coverage with his hangtime, and few punters in the league are as good at flipping field position by accurately landing kicks inside the 20-yard line. Placekicker Rian Lindell continues to be a model of consistency. He holds the team record for career field-goal percentage, and his 248 consecutive extra points is the longest streak to start a career in NFL history. Lindell has a strong leg, yet is very accurate from distance. His 76.5 field-goal-conversion percentage since 2005 is the third best in the league.

McGee and Parrish make a dynamic one-two punch in the return game. McGee is one of 10 players in NFL history with five kickoff returns for touchdowns. He runs with patience, sets up his blocks well and is decisive when he finds an opening. Parrish led the NFL with a 16.3-yard average last season. His great speed, darting moves and explosive burst through the hole make him a threat to score on every play. **GRADE: A**

BOTTOM LINE

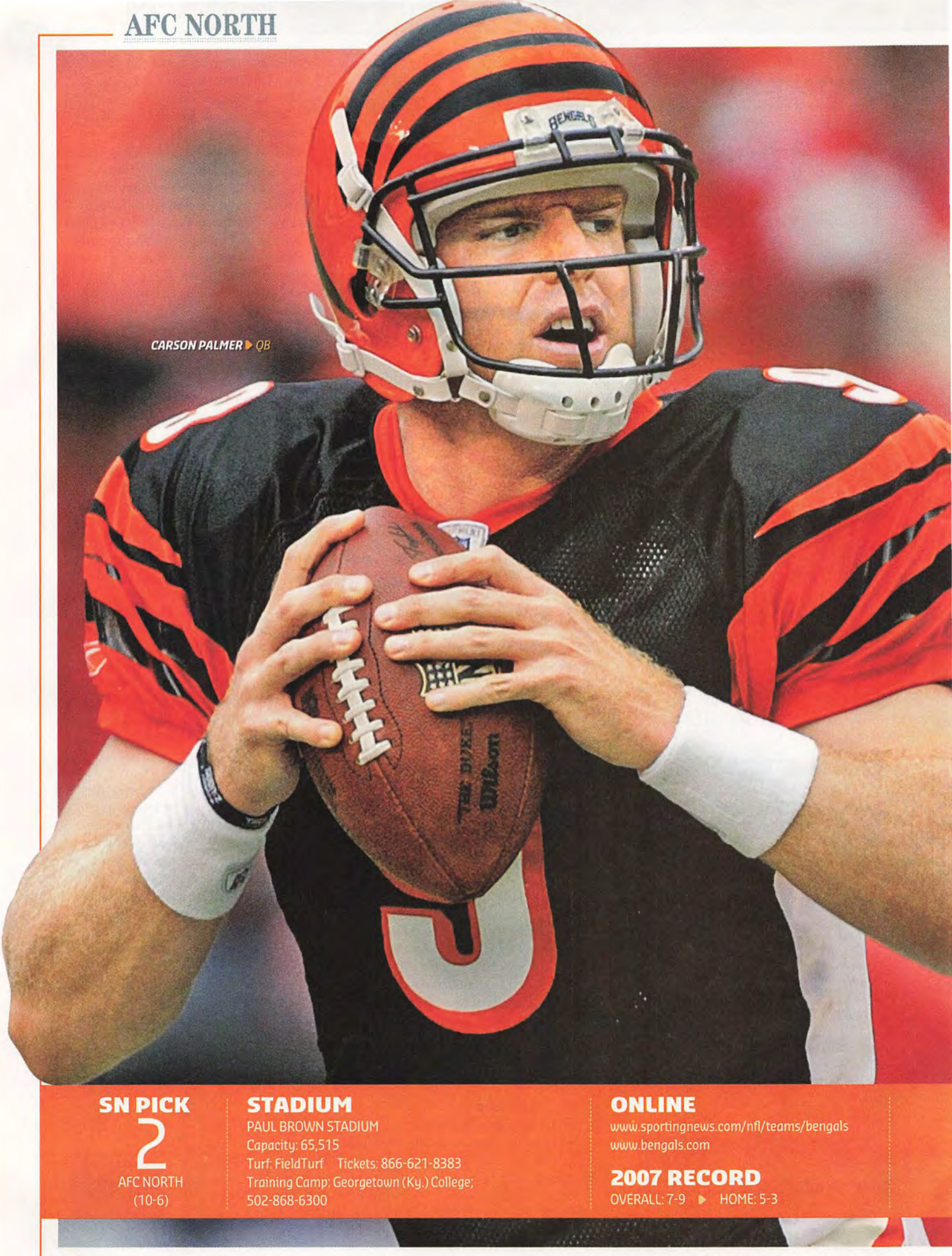
During Jauron's first two seasons, the Bills had a lot of growing pains, from being forced to play inexperienced people to enduring a ridiculous amount of injuries. Yet both of those squads were in playoff contention until the last month of the season. With a big injection of talent from free agency and the draft, this is clearly the best team Jauron has put on the field.

77

FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT

UP



CARSON PALMER ▶ QB

SN PICK
2
AFC NORTH
(10-6)

STADIUM
PAUL BROWN STADIUM
Capacity: 65,515
Turf: FieldTurf Tickets: 866-621-8383
Training Camp: Georgetown (Ky.) College;
502-868-6300

ONLINE
www.sportingnews.com/nfl/teams/bengals
www.bengals.com

2007 RECORD
OVERALL: 7-9 ▶ HOME: 5-3

(L TO R): MATTHEW KUTZ / SN; JOHN SOMMERS II/ICON SMI; HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL

CINCINNATI

BENGALS

Bad-boy image aside, Lewis and crew have plenty left to improve on the field

By Mark Curnutte, *Cincinnati Enquirer*

As recently as 2005, the Bengals were the talk of the league, skyrocketing to the top of the AFC North and making their first playoff appearance in a staggering 15 years. Two disappointing seasons and a host of bad press later, their return to disparity has been just as swift. Now Cincinnati is largely dismissed as long on character concerns and individual stars but short on team—a bunch of also-rans squandering a great deal of talent.

Following a bitterly disappointing 7-9 season—the first sub-.500 showing in coach Marvin Lewis' five years at the helm—the offseason has been anything but peaceful. Wide receiver

BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

BEN UTECHT ▸ TE

Utecht, signed as a restricted free agent from the Colts, brings a middle-of-the-field threat at tight end—as well as the ability to stretch the defense—that quarterback Carson Palmer has not had before. Utecht has 71 career receptions (41 for first downs) and an 11.3-yard average with three touchdowns.

FANTASY SPIN

http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football

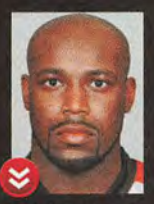
T.J Houshmandzadeh is coming off a terrific 12-TD season. To put up similar numbers in '08, he needs buddy Chad Johnson to remain a Bengal and continue drawing away top coverage from the other side.

$ BUY »»
Carson Palmer, QB

» SELL »»
Rudi Johnson, RB

Z SLEEPER »»
Shayne Graham, K

PALMER



JOHNSON

GRAHAM

Chad Johnson, with four years remaining on his contract, has demanded a trade and dragged the organization through the mud in the process. Though they waived receiver Chris Henry in April after his fifth arrest since 2005, the Bengals remain the league's bad-boy poster children.

Defensive coordinator Chuck Bresnahan and linebackers coach Ricky Hunley were fired, and fixing that side of the ball remains the primary concern. Mike Zimmer replaces Bresnahan as Lewis' third defensive coordinator. The Bengals' biggest free-agent acquisition was pass-rush end Antwan Odom. For the fourth year in a row, they used their first-round draft pick on a defensive player in USC linebacker Keith Rivers.

OFFENSE

Lewis believes the Bengals' offense has gotten overly "cute" by passing too much and ignoring a run game that was the league's 11th best in 2005. Coordinator Bob Bratkowski's task is to run the ball more productively, which will keep the offense on the field and the defense off of it by converting third downs and controlling the clock. Quarterback Carson Palmer can't win every game on his own.

Quarterbacks Palmer, despite throwing a career-high 20 interceptions in 2007, remains one of the league's elite quarterbacks. He threw for 26 touchdowns and set franchise records with 4,131 passing yards and 371 completions last year, but the offense was too dependent on his arm and the running game struggled.

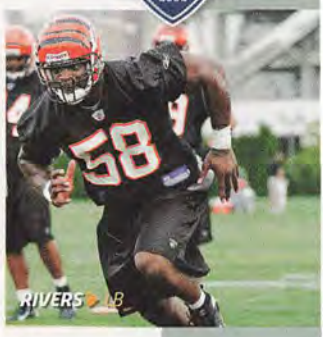
Tension appears to have increased between Palmer and Johnson, who could be on his way out the door. The two argued openly on the field during a home loss to New England early last season, and then had a back-and-forth in the media regarding Johnson's holdout.

Ryan Fitzpatrick returns as the top backup. The Bengals signed Palmer's younger brother, Jordan, to compete with second-year pro Jeff Rowe for No. 3. **GRADE: A**

Running backs Not long ago, the Bengals were a power-running team. Rudi Johnson rushed—primarily between the tackles—for more than

DRAFT REPORT GRADE ▸ B

The Bengals have received a lot of criticism after taking a player with off-field baggage (DT **Jason Shirley**) and not trading up for DT Sedrick Ellis, but the team selected a number of solid players. **Keith Rivers** gives them a very athletic outside linebacker who will chase down plays sideline-to-sideline and prove valuable in pass coverage. Tall WR **Jerome Simpson** has quick feet and deceptive speed combined with good athleticism and hands. He needs to improve his route running, though. Third-round picks **Pat Sims** and **Andre Caldwell** were both viewed as late first-rounders in January. Sims has the size and athleticism to become an impact defensive tackle, but he showed up to the combine overweight and out of shape and looked terrible in his workouts. Caldwell, meanwhile, fared well at the combine, but the wide receiver dropped over half of the passes thrown his way at Florida's Pro Day. **Anthony Collins** has the talent to start at offensive tackle, but he must become more consistent and competitive. Shirley made for a shocking pick; in addition to his character concerns, he does not play with much effort or intensity. Tough, hard-nosed safety **Corey Lynch** plays with an aggressive streak and flies up the field in run support, but his struggles in pass coverage will probably keep him from starting. **Matt Sherry** is an athletic but raw developmental prospect at tight end. **Angelo Craig** has quick feet and good athleticism as an outside linebacker/defensive end, but he must add weight, improve his technique and become more aggressive on the pass rush. Wide receiver **Mario Urrutia** does not have premier speed, but his height, hands and playmaking ability could pay off.



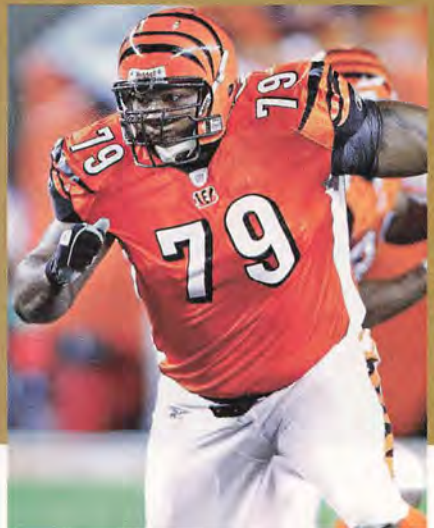
2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
1	9	Rivers, Keith	LB	6-3	235	USC
2	15	Simpson, Jerome	WR	6-2	185	Coastal Carolina
3	14	Sims, Pat	DT	6-4	316	Auburn
3	34	Caldwell, Andre	WR	6-0	200	Florida
4	13	Collins, Anthony	T	6-5	310	Kansas
5	10	Shirley, Jason	DT	6-5	330	Fresno State
6	11	Lynch, Corey	S	6-0	205	Appalachian St.
6	41	Sherry, Matt	TE	6-4	255	Villanova
7	37	Craig, Angelo	DE	6-5	235	Cincinnati
7	39	Urrutia, Mario	WR	6-6	232	Louisville

5-YEAR WINS TREND

THE BOOK ON ... STACY ANDREWS *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"You've got to understand that the game is still new to him. He is not just a big, slow-footed guy who engulfs you. He is mobile. And then he can strike you with his timing and the explosion he generates in his hips. His best football is ahead of him as an offensive lineman. I've wondered why they haven't tried him at three-technique (over the center on defense). With that type of punch and athleticism, he might be better than some of the three-technique guys around the NFL. He has so much quickness and explosiveness for a man his size (6-7, 342 pounds). One thing is for sure: He gets better and better with each rep he gets. The only chance you have to beat him is because of his inexperience."



NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	348.0	10
RUSHING	97.3	24
PASSING	250.8	7
SCORING	380	11
PUNT RETURNS	4.9	32
KICK RETURNS	23.1	13
RED ZONE TD %	48.2	23
TOTAL DEFENSE	348.8	27
AGAINST RUSH	118.3	21
AGAINST PASS	230.4	26
POINTS ALLOWED	385	24
INTERCEPTIONS	19	6t
SACKS	22	32
TURNOVER DIFF.	+5	8t

TOP TO BOTTOM: FRANK VICTORES / US PRESSWIRE; SCOTT BOEHM / GETTY IMAGES

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE *(an opponent breaks down the Bengals)*

"First of all, the defense has to play better. They have to address their defensive front in terms of improvement and additional depth. But they have two solid ends in (Robert) Geathers and (Antwan) Odom. They have a lot of question marks at linebacker, even if Odell Thurman (reinstated by the NFL) can come back. They have a young secondary that played well last year but will have to continue to improve. They need for Deltha O'Neal to play well, even if he is the third cornerback. The injury to (tailback) Rudi Johnson really hurt them last year. They need that bell-cow running back. The offense needs to play more consistently. It can't disappear. They need to do better on third down and win in the red zone. They need to get the run game going so they don't depend on (quarterback) Carson Palmer to make so many big plays. Wide receiver has become a concern for them because they had to cut Chris Henry and Chad Johnson is threatening to sit out."

1,300 yards in 2004, '05 and '06 before dropping to 497 last year while losing much of the season to a hamstring injury.

The Bengals considered drafting Illinois running back Rashard Mendenhall in the first round, but they ended up taking no one from a deep talent pool at the position. Johnson is expected to be healthy, though. Even Chris Perry, the 2004 first-round pick, is due to return; he has not played since late 2006 because of serious ankle and leg injuries. The Bengals also have steady veteran Kenny Watson and up-and-coming DeDe Dorsey in tow. A healthy Perry would provide a nice complement to Johnson's power game, which was the idea back in '04. **GRADE: C+**

Receivers » Once the strength of the roster, the wide-receiver ranks have become an area of concern. After Henry's release, the Bengals signed former Raider Doug Gabriel and drafted three wideouts, using two of their first four picks on Coastal Carolina's Jerome Simpson and Florida's Andre Caldwell.

The team is prepared to move forward if Johnson sticks to his word and sits out. His absence would officially elevate T.J. Houshmandzadeh, who tied for the NFL lead with 112 receptions in 2007, to the No. 1 role. Opposite him would be one of the rookies, or someone from a list of backups that includes former Packer Antonio Chatman. With Johnson, the corps is one of the NFL's best. What it can do without him remains to be seen.

In former Colts backup Ben Utecht, the Bengals gave Palmer the type of target he has not had in four years under center: a tight end who can stretch the middle of the field. Combined with blocking-oriented starter Reggie Kelly, Utecht makes tight end a position of strength. **GRADE: A**

Offensive line » Some of the most important offseason work is being done in Arizona and Alabama, where starting offensive tackles Levi Jones and Willie Anderson are preparing their bodies for a 16-game NFL schedule. Jones, whose request for a trade won't be granted, rebounded from a slow start in 2007 due to a knee injury and started 13 games in a row. Anderson made only five starts because of knee injuries of his own.

The Bengals used their franchise tag on rising star Stacy Andrews, who made three starts at left guard and 11 at right tackle. Lewis wants him to win a starting job somewhere on the line. The line set a Bengals record by allowing just 17 sacks in 2007, but center Eric Ghiaciuc needs to improve his run blocking. Second-year backup Dan Santucci may challenge him. Versatile Andrew Whitworth and dependable Bobbie Williams return as the incumbent starters at left and right guard, respectively.

The Bengals added Kansas All-America tackle Anthony Collins in the draft; he could play guard as well. The line is talented and chock-full of high-round picks. A return to health by the unit's veteran stalwarts would go a long way toward improving the rushing attack. **GRADE: B**

» DEFENSE

Here they go again. The Bengals will enter the season determined to improve a defense that

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		
QB	Carson Palmer	Ryan Fitzpatrick
FB	Jeremi Johnson	Reggie Kelly
RB	Rudi Johnson	Chris Perry
WR	T.J. Houshmandzadeh	Andre Caldwell
WR	Chad Johnson	Jerome Simpson
TE	Reggie Kelly	Ben Utecht
LT	Levi Jones	Anthony Collins
LG	Andrew Whitworth	Nate Livings
C	Eric Ghiaciuc	Dan Santucci
RG	Stacy Andrews	Bobbie Williams
RT	Willie Anderson	Scott Kooistra
DEFENSE		
LE	Robert Geathers	Frostee Rucker
LT	Domata Peko	Pat Sims
RT	John Thornton	Michael Myers
RE	Antwan Odom	Jonathan Fanene
SLB	Rashad Jeanty	Eric Henderson
MLB	Ahmad Brooks	Odell Thurman
WLB	Keith Rivers	Dhani Jones
LCB	Johnathan Joseph	Deltha O'Neal
RCB	Leon Hall	David Jones
SS	Chinedum Ndukwe	Dexter Jackson
FS	Marvin White	Kyries Hebert
SPECIALISTS		
K	Shayne Graham	
P	Kyle Larson	
KR	Andre Caldwell	
PR	Antonio Chatman	
LS	Brad St. Louis	

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 @ Baltimore — SEPT. 7 | 1:00 — SCORE
WEEK 2 Tennessee — SEPT. 14 | 1:00 — SCORE
WEEK 3 @ New York Giants — SEPT. 21 | 1:00 — SCORE
WEEK 4 Cleveland — SEPT. 28 | 1:00 — SCORE
WEEK 5 @ Dallas — OCT. 5 | 4:15 — SCORE
WEEK 6 @ New York Jets — OCT. 12 | 1:00 — SCORE
WEEK 7 Pittsburgh — OCT. 19 | 1:00 — SCORE
WEEK 8 *OPEN DATE*
WEEK 9 Jacksonville — NOV. 2 | 1:00 — SCORE
WEEK 10 @ Houston — NOV. 9 | 1:00 — SCORE
WEEK 11 Philadelphia — NOV. 16 | 1:00 — SCORE
WEEK 12 @ Pittsburgh — NOV. 20 | 8:15 — SCORE
WEEK 13 Baltimore — NOV. 30 | 1:00 — SCORE
WEEK 14 @ Indianapolis — DEC. 7 | 1:00 — SCORE
WEEK 15 Washington — DEC. 14 | 1:00 — SCORE
WEEK 16 @ Cleveland — DEC. 21 | 1:00 — SCORE
WEEK 17 Kansas City — DEC. 28 | 1:00 — SCORE

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

has ranked 28th, 19th, 28th, 30th and 27th, respectively, in the league under Lewis. Rivers will be counted on to contribute right away. The team's last two first-round selections, cornerbacks Johnathan Joseph and Leon Hall, have already developed into starters.

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/10	W	27-20	Baltimore Ravens
09/16	L	45-51	at Cleveland Browns
09/23	L	21-24	at Seattle Seahawks
10/01	L	13-34	New England Patriots
10/14	L	20-27	at Kansas City Chiefs
10/21	W	38-31	New York Jets
10/28	L	13-24	Pittsburgh Steelers
11/04	L	21-33	at Buffalo Bills
11/11	W	21-7	at Baltimore Ravens
11/18	L	27-35	Arizona Cardinals
11/25	W	35-6	Tennessee Titans
12/02	L	10-24	at Pittsburgh Steelers
12/09	W	19-10	St. Louis Rams
12/15	L	13-20	at San Francisco 49ers
12/23	W	19-14	Cleveland Browns
12/30	W	38-25	at Miami Dolphins

WON 7, LOST 9

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Watson	178	763	4.3	24	7
R. Johnson	170	497	2.9	22	3
Dorsey	21	183	8.7	45	0
C. Johnson	6	47	7.8	16	0
J. Johnson	7	25	3.6	12	0
Houshmandzadeh	5	14	2.8	8	0
Palmer	24	10	0.4	10	0
Perry	1	9	9.0	9	0
Chatman	1	5	5.0	5	0
Holt	2	2	1.0	1	0
Green	1	1	1.0	1	0
BENGALS	**416**	**1556**	**3.7**	**45**	**10**
OPPONENTS	449	1893	4.2	66t	11

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Houshmandzadeh	112	1143	10.2	42t	12
C. Johnson	93	1440	15.5	70t	8
Watson	52	374	7.2	43	0
Henry	21	343	16.3	52t	2
Kelly	20	211	10.6	26	0
Chatman	19	149	7.8	15	1
Holt	16	143	8.9	22	1
R. Johnson	13	110	8.5	33	1
Coats	12	122	10.2	25	0
J. Johnson	6	32	5.3	14	1
Dorsey	4	19	4.8	17	0
Green	3	33	11.0	18	0
Maxwell	1	5	5.0	5	0
Perry	1	7	7.0	7	0
BENGALS	**373**	**4131**	**11.1**	**70t**	**26**
OPPONENTS	353	3815	10.8	73	29

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Palmer	575	373	4131	26	20
BENGALS	**575**	**373**	**4131**	**26**	**20**
OPPONENTS	540	353	3815	29	19

SACKS — **BENGALS 22, OPPONENTS 17**

Geathers 3.5, Ndukwe 2, Smith 2, Williams 2, Peko 1.5, Robinson 1.5, Adams 1, Brooks 1, Fanene 1, Johnson 1, Jones 1, Marshall 1, Myers 1, Thornton 1, Jackson 0.5

Defensive line The Bengals tried to trade for Lions tackle Shaun Rogers, who ended up with the Browns. Then Cincinnati had a deal in place for Dewayne Robertson, but the team was scared off by his troubled knees and the Jets eventually shipped him to Denver. The Bengals made no attempt to trade up for Glenn Dorsey or Sedrick Ellis, the best two defensive tackles in the draft.

Instead, they addressed their greatest offseason need with Auburn's Pat Sims in the third round and Fresno State's Jason Shirley in the fifth. The Shirley pick was curious considering last season's DUI arrest and multiple suspensions while in college. For a team trying to change its image, the Bengals are taking another big character risk.

Sims will be counted on to contribute immediately in a rotation with starters Domata Peko and John Thornton. Odom had eight sacks for Tennessee in 2007. He will pair with end Robert Geathers (10.5 sacks in 2006) in the quest to improve on last year's team sack total of 22, which ranked last in the NFL. Justin Smith, a seven-year starter at end, left in free agency. **GRADE: C-**

Linebackers The Bengals put four linebackers on the injured-reserve list last season and had to move Geathers to outside linebacker for four starts. There will be no shortage this season.

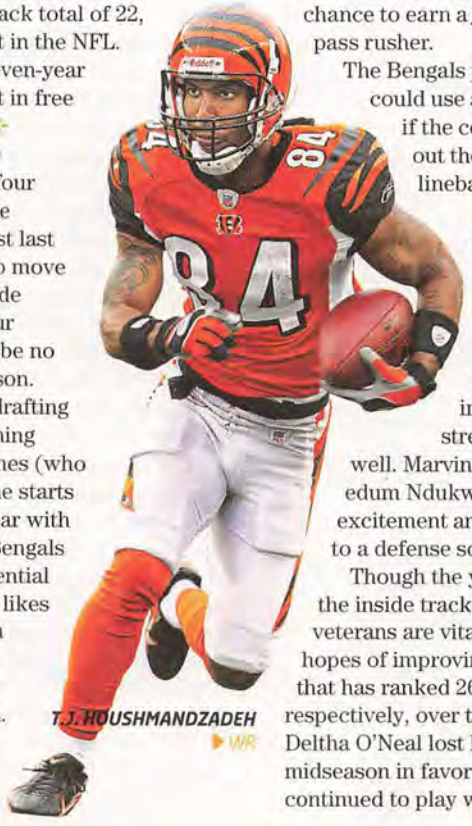
In addition to drafting Rivers and re-signing veteran Dhani Jones (who played well in nine starts during his first year with Cincinnati), the Bengals loaded up on potential backups with the likes of former Arizona Cardinals Darryl Blackstock and Brandon Johnson. Odell Thurman, a second-round pick in 2005, has been reinstated following what amounted to a two-year suspension for substance abuse. A dream trio at linebacker would be Thurman, Rivers and Ahmad Brooks, who required groin surgery last year. But the Bengals can't count on Thurman and Brooks, so the competition is expected to be wide-open.

Players to watch include Rashad Jeanty, who returned from an August surgery to make seven starts on the strong side and bolster the run defense, and converted college end Eric Henderson, who will be given a chance to earn a job as an outside pass rusher.

The Bengals play a base 4-3 but could use a lot of 3-4 elements if the competition brings out the best in their linebackers. **GRADE: C-**

Secondary The development of Joseph and Hall has improved the overall play of the pass defense. Two rookie safeties impressed down the stretch last year as well. Marvin White and Chinedum Ndukwe brought some excitement and big-play potential to a defense sorely in need.

Though the young players have the inside track on starting, two veterans are vital to the Bengals' hopes of improving a pass defense that has ranked 26th, 31st and 26th, respectively, over the past three years. Deltha O'Neal lost his starting job at midseason in favor of Hall, but he continued to play well as the third



T.J. HOUSHMANDZADEH ▶ WR

ANDY LYONS / GETTY IMAGES

OFFSEASON MOVES

ADDITIONS:

DE **Antwan Odom** *(FA/Titans)*, LB **Darryl Blackstock** *(FA/Cardinals)*, TE **Ben Utecht** *(FA/Colts)*, LB **Brandon Johnson** (FA/Cardinals), WR **Doug Gabriel** *(FA/Raiders)*

SUBTRACTIONS:

DB **Madieu Williams** *(FA/Vikings)*, MLB **Caleb Miller** *(FA)*, LB **Landon Johnson** *(FA/Panthers)*, C **Alex Stepanovich** *(FA/Falcons)*, DE **Bryan Robinson** *(FA/Cardinals)*, OLB **Lemar Marshall** *(FA)*, DE **Justin Smith** *(FA/49ers)*, WR **Tab Perry** *(FA/Dolphins)*, **Brandon Williams** *(FA)*, WR **Chris Henry** *(FA)*

BENGALS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1 Bill Bergey *(1969-73)*

Bengals president Mike Brown has called this five-time Pro Bowler the best linebacker in team history.

2 Jim LeClair *(1972-83)*

Replaced Bergey as the starting middle linebacker and made the Pro Bowl in 1976. Oh, and he once wrestled a 400-pound bear to a draw.

3 Reggie Williams *(1976-89)*

Started for 14 years at right outside linebacker and played in two Super Bowls.

INSIDE THE HEADSET

MARVIN LEWIS

Understandably so, Lewis appeared to lose some confidence in the Bengals' rushing offense in 2007. In a 24-13 home loss to the Steelers, he was going to run a play on fourth-and-goal from the 2 but called timeout and kicked a field goal. The longtime former defensive coordinator still trusts his defense, even though it has let him down repeatedly.

cornerback. Safety Dexter Jackson brings some attitude and run-stopping ability, though the 10th-year pro might be best used in spot duty to keep him healthy.

The Bengals added Appalachian State safety Corey Lynch on the second day of the draft, and they want to see him challenge for time in the secondary in addition to playing on special teams.

The secondary is young, but it needs to continue its fast improvement. A better pass rush would help the coverage. Tight coverage, meanwhile, especially on the corners, could give the pass rush some extra time to reach the quarterback. **GRADE: C**

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Bengals' trio of specialists—kicker Shayne Graham, punter/holder Kyle Larson and snapper Brad St. Louis—rebounded from their collective late-season meltdown in 2006 to return to form last season. Larson was re-signed to a big contract after dropping 21 punts inside the 20-yard-line against just three touchbacks.

With a glaring need to improve their return game, the Bengals added potential firepower with third-round pick Caldwell, who brought back kickoffs early in his career at Florida. But there has been no upgrade in the punt-return area, where the Bengals were dead last in the NFL with a 4.9-yard average last year. If he can stay healthy, Chatman might be the best option; he returned 18 punts for a 5.2-yard average in 2007. O'Neal, now that he's no longer starting on defense, could also get the job.

Special-teams coordinator Darrin Simmons restructured his cover teams on the fly last season in the wake of a series of injuries to linebackers and safeties—the core of his units. Credit the Bengals for always keeping one eye on a player's ability to contribute on special teams. **GRADE: B**

BOTTOM LINE

Just about anywhere else in the league, Lewis' job might be on the line with a five-year record of 42-38. Not in Cincinnati, though. The Bengals clearly remain his team. A talented offense needs to do better with the basics—running the ball and converting on third down—but the Bengals always have a chance with the elite Palmer at quarterback. The defense needs to return to its take-away ways and develop a personality. In a tough AFC North, no team looks prepared to run away from the pack. The Bengals were down in 2007 and still finished with seven victories; nine could win the division this time around.

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FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT

STEADY

ROSTER

#	QUARTERBACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
11	Fitzpatrick, Ryan	QB	6-2	225	11/24/1982	3	Harvard
9	Palmer, Carson	QB	6-5	230	12/27/1979	4	USC
5	Palmer, Jordan	QB	6-5	235	05/30/1984	0	UTEP
3	Rowe, Jeff	QB	6-5	221	03/21/1984	0	Nevada

#	OFFENSIVE LINE	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
71	Anderson, Willie	T	6-5	340	07/11/1975	12	Auburn
79	Andrews, Stacy	G	6-7	342	06/02/1981	4	Mississippi
64	Cook, Kyle	C	6-3	295	07/25/1983	0	Michigan State
53	Ghiaciuc, Eric	C	6-4	302	05/28/1981	3	Central Michigan
76	Jones, Levi	T	6-5	307	08/24/1979	6	Arizona State
75	Kooistra, Scott	T	6-6	325	10/14/1980	5	North Carolina State
62	Livings, Nate	G	6-5	310	03/16/1982	0	LSU
65	Santucci, Dan	C	6-4	296	09/06/1983	1	Notre Dame
74	Uperesa, Dane	T	6-5	331	01/25/1984	0	Hawaii
77	Whitworth, Andrew	G	6-7	339	12/12/1981	2	LSU
63	Williams, Bobbie	G	6-4	345	09/25/1976	7	Arkansas

#	RUNNING BACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
27	Dorsey, DeDe	RB	5-11	196	08/01/1984	2	Lindenwood
30	Irons, Kenny	RB	5-11	203	09/15/1983	0	Auburn
31	Johnson, Jeremi	FB	5-11	260	09/04/1980	5	Western Kentucky
32	Johnson, Rudi	RB	5-10	214	10/01/1979	7	Auburn
23	Perry, Chris	RB	6-0	224	12/27/1981	3	Michigan
33	Watson, Kenny	RB	6-0	218	03/13/1978	6	Penn State

#	RECEIVERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
83	Chatman, Antonio	WR	5-8	183	02/12/1979	5	Cincinnati
86	Coats, Daniel	TE	6-3	255	04/16/1984	1	Brigham Young
12	Gabriel, Doug	WR	6-2	215	08/27/1980	4	UCF
16	Holt, Glenn	WR	6-1	193	07/31/1984	2	Kentucky
84	Houshmandzadeh, T.J.	WR	6-1	199	09/26/1977	7	Oregon State
85	Johnson, Chad	WR	6-1	192	01/09/1978	7	Oregon State
82	Kelly, Reggie	TE	6-4	250	02/22/1977	9	Mississippi State
80	Lawrie, Nate	TE	6-7	255	10/17/1981	4	Yale
10	Maxwell, Marcus	WR	6-4	205	07/08/1983	2	Oregon
48	St. Louis, Brad	TE	6-3	243	08/19/1976	8	Missouri State
81	Utecht, Ben	TE	6-6	251	06/30/1981	3	Minnesota

#	DEFENSIVE LINE	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
66	Adams, Titus	DT	6-4	305	01/28/1983	0	Nebraska
61	Burton, Antwon	DT	6-2	325	06/11/1983	3	Temple
68	Fanene, Jonathan	DE	6-4	291	03/19/1982	3	Utah
91	Geathers, Robert	DE	6-3	265	08/11/1983	4	Georgia
96	Myers, Michael	DT	6-2	300	01/20/1976	10	Alabama
98	Odom, Antwan	DE	6-5	274	09/24/1981	4	Alabama
94	Peko, Domata	DT	6-3	319	11/27/1984	2	Michigan State
92	Rucker, Frostee	DE	6-3	280	09/14/1983	1	USC
97	Thornton, John	DT	6-3	297	10/02/1976	9	West Virginia

#	DEFENSIVE BACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
46	Adams, Blue	CB	5-10	187	10/15/1979	4	Cincinnati
36	Busing, John	S	6-2	221	09/01/1983	2	Miami (OH)
29	Hall, Leon	CB	5-11	199	12/09/1984	1	Michigan
34	Hebert, Kyries	S	6-3	205	10/09/1980	0	Louisiana-Lafayette
28	Jackson, Dexter	S	6-0	210	07/28/1977	9	Florida State
20	Jones, David	CB	5-11	193	09/19/1985	1	Wingate
44	Jones, Herana-Daze	S	5-11	205	04/15/1982	2	Indiana
22	Joseph, Johnathan	CB	5-11	192	04/16/1984	2	South Carolina
43	Kilmer, Ethan	S	6-0	205	01/31/1983	1	Penn State
41	Ndukwe, Chinedum	S	6-2	218	03/04/1985	1	Notre Dame
24	O'Neal, Deltha	CB	5-11	194	01/30/1977	8	California
26	White, Marvin	S	6-1	199	12/05/1983	1	TCU

#	LINEBACKERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
56	Blackstock, Darryl	LB	6-3	244	05/30/1983	3	Virginia
55	Brooks, Ahmad	LB	6-3	259	03/14/1984	2	Virginia
78	Henderson, Eric	LB	6-3	265	01/08/1983	0	Georgia Tech
93	Jeanty, Rashad	LB	6-2	245	04/17/1983	2	UCF
59	Johnson, Brandon	LB	6-5	232	04/05/1983	2	Louisville
57	Jones, Dhani	LB	6-1	240	02/22/1978	7	Michigan
52	Maxwell, Jim	LB	6-4	242	08/08/1981	4	Gardner-Webb
51	Mays, Corey	LB	6-1	245	11/27/1983	2	Notre Dame
99	Pollack, David	LB	6-2	255	06/19/1982	2	Georgia
51	Thurman, Odell	LB	6-0	235	07/09/1983	1	Georgia

#	KICKERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
17	Graham, Shayne	K	6-0	200	12/09/1977	7	Virginia Tech
19	Larson, Kyle	P	6-1	204	09/02/1980	4	Nebraska

▶ **MARVIN LEWIS,** *Head coach*

Bob Bratkowski, off. coord.; **Mike Zimmer**, def. coord.; **Paul Alexander**, asst. head coach/off. line; **Jim Anderson**, running backs; **Louie Cioffi**, asst. def. backs; **Kevin Coyle**, def. backs, **Jeff FitzGerald**, linebackers; **Paul Guenther**, asst. special teams/asst. linebackers; **Jonathan Hayes**, tight ends; **Jay Hayes**, def. line; **Mike Sheppard**, wide receivers; **Darrin Simmons**, special teams; **Bob Surace**, asst. off. line; **Ken Zampese**, quarterbacks

HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL MEDIA

CLEVELAND BROWNS

Will fourth season be the playoff charm for Romeo and a suddenly imposing set of young QBs?

By Steve Doerschuk, *Canton (Ohio) Repository*

For too many years, the guys in the plain orange helmets were just plain pathetic.

In 2007, though, the Browns played as if they'd seized on the classic line from The Doors: "Break on through to the other side."

However tepid a 10-6, non-playoff season might be in some towns, it drove Browns general manager Phil Savage to glowing talk about windows.

"I think our window to do something," Savage says, "is in 2008, 2009 and 2010."

And, yes, by "something" he was thinking in Roman numerals.

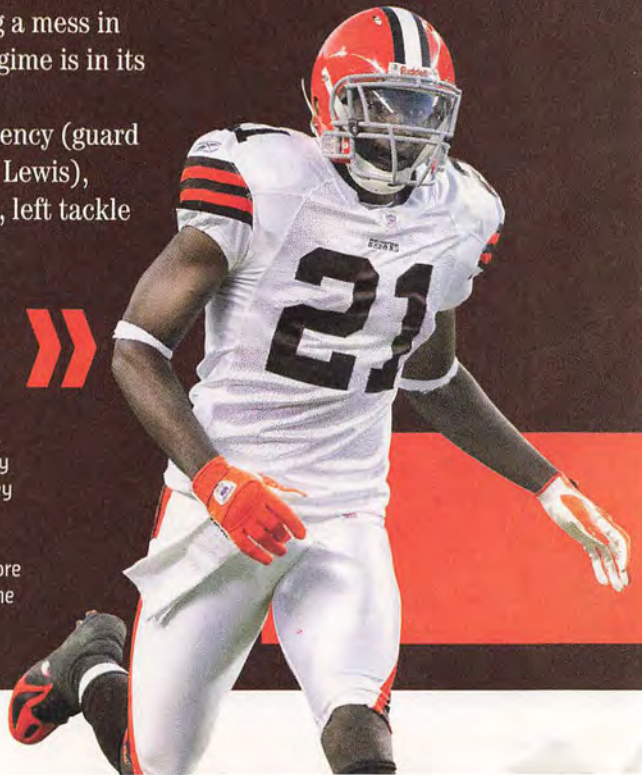
That's understandable. The Browns were 19-45 from 2003-07, with Savage inheriting a mess in 2005. The Savage-Romeo Crennel regime is in its fourth year. So, it's time.

A mixture of bold moves in free agency (guard Eric Steinbach, running back Jamal Lewis), the draft (receiver Braylon Edwards, left tackle

BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

BRODNEY POOL ▸ DB

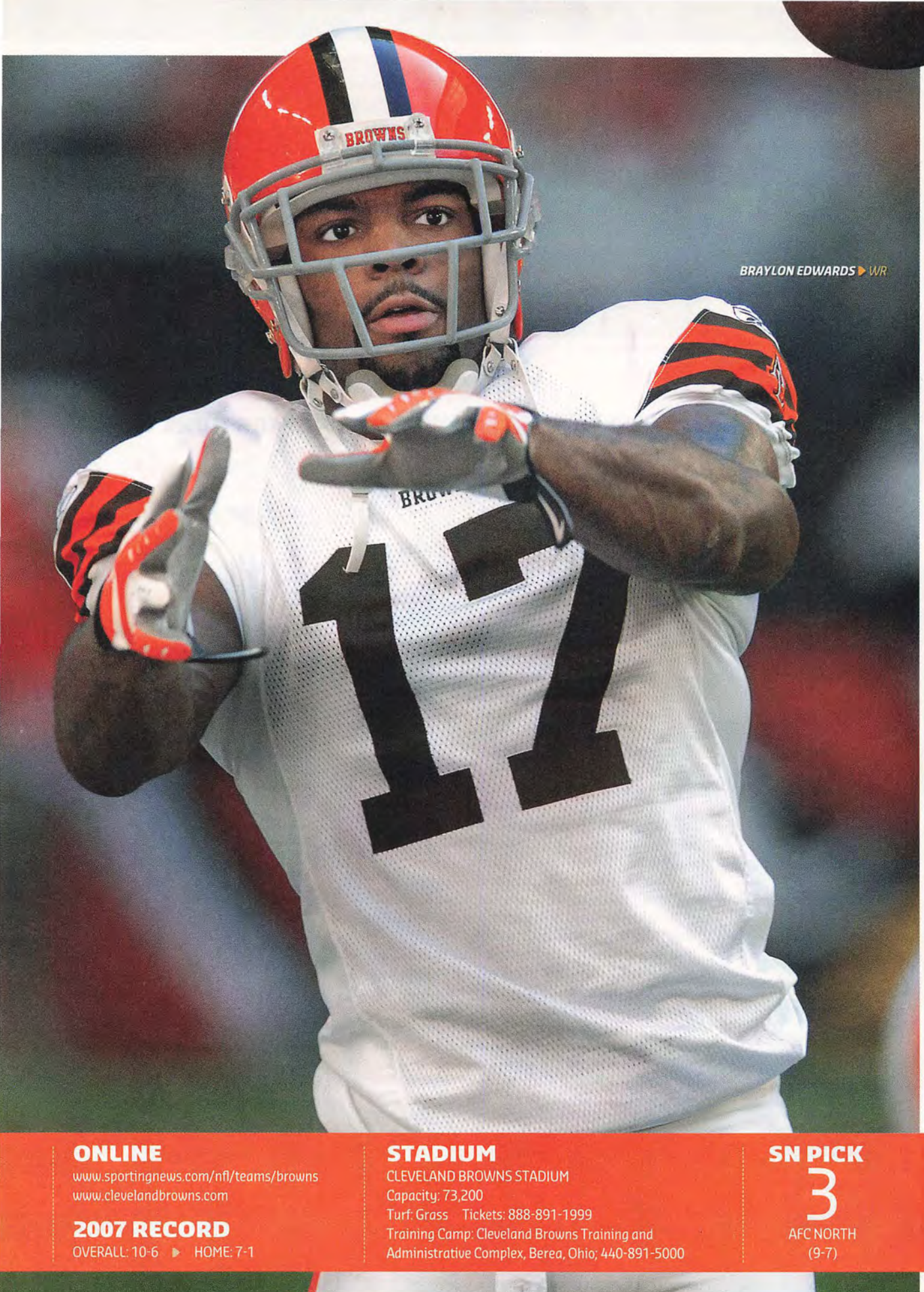
The Browns have little to show from drafting Charlie Frye, Antonio Perkins and David McMillan, their third- through fifth-round picks in 2005. They really need that year's second-round pick, Brodney Pool, to break through. Pool was an OK starter in 2006, but he has the athleticism to be a star. He's still very young. If Pool learns how to play with more fire and consistency, he could be the playmaker the defense has lacked.



VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE

(an opponent breaks down the Browns)

"If they get quarterback play, they can have as good an offense as anybody. Donte Stallworth is kind of an X-factor for them. With (Braylon) Edwards, (Kellen) Winslow and (Jamal) Lewis all worth lots of touches, and now Stallworth, they'd better have an ego-management coordinator. I'm not sold on their defense. Maybe the change of scenery will make Shaun Rogers look like he cares, but show me. Corey Williams is a good player, but he's not a franchise player, even though Green Bay put the tag on him. Rogers had better play. I'm not sure who their difference-maker is. Teams figured out Kamerion Wimbley. He's real quick, but his moves aren't that deceptive. He still might be a player. I'll take a team full of guys like (Josh) Cribbs. What a special-teams player. Guys see him flying around, and it's contagious. Overall, they have a shot, but only if they prove they have a real quarterback."



ONLINE

www.sportingnews.com/nfl/teams/browns
www.clevelandbrowns.com

2007 RECORD

OVERALL: 10-6 ▶ HOME: 7-1

STADIUM

CLEVELAND BROWNS STADIUM
Capacity: 73,200
Turf: Grass Tickets: 888-891-1999
Training Camp: Cleveland Browns Training and Administrative Complex, Berea, Ohio; 440-891-5000

SN PICK

3
AFC NORTH
(9-7)

OPPOSITE: DAVID STLUKA / GETTY IMAGES; MARK J. REBILAS / US PRESSWIRE

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 Dallas
SEPT. 7 | 4:15
— SCORE

WEEK 2 Pittsburgh
SEPT. 14 | 8:15
— SCORE

WEEK 3 @ Baltimore
SEPT. 21 | 4:15
— SCORE

WEEK 4 @ Cincinnati
SEPT. 28 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 5 *OPEN DATE*

WEEK 6 New York Giants
OCT. 13 | 8:30
— SCORE

WEEK 7 @ Washington
OCT. 19 | 4:15
— SCORE

WEEK 8 @ Jacksonville
OCT. 26 | 4:05
— SCORE

WEEK 9 Baltimore
NOV. 2 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 10 Denver
NOV. 6 | 8:15
— SCORE

WEEK 11 @ Buffalo
NOV. 17 | 8:30
— SCORE

WEEK 12 Houston
NOV. 23 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 13 Indianapolis
NOV. 30 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 14 @ Tennessee
DEC. 7 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 15 @ Philadelphia
DEC. 15 | 8:30
— SCORE

WEEK 16 Cincinnati
DEC. 21 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 17 @ Pittsburgh
DEC. 28 | 1:00
— SCORE

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

THE BOOK ON ... DEREK ANDERSON & BRADY QUINN

(how a rival sizes them up)

"I like the Browns, but I'm not sold on Derek Anderson one way or the other. A lot of what happens with them depends on him. It doesn't look like he panics, but sometimes it doesn't look like he's paying close-enough attention. It's hard to read his mentality, and you pretty much only have last year to go on. You can't write off his record (10-5 as a starter), but you worry about his bad game at Cincinnati. From what I know about Brady Quinn, you know you're getting the right mentality. I suppose Anderson has a bigger arm. In a way it's a good problem to have. In a way it's not, because they don't know if either one is a playoff-type quarterback."

(L TO R): KIRBY LEE / US PRESSWIRE; DAVID DUROCHIK FOR SN

Joe Thomas) and trades defensive linemen Corey Williams and Shaun Rogers) has helped forge a strong overall roster.

But a lot rides on the debatable stability of the quarterback situation. Maybe everything.

OFFENSE

Rob Chudzinski was a blast of fresh air in his first year as offensive coordinator. A stagnant offense that averaged 264.6 yards in 2006 zoomed to 351.3 under the former lieutenant of Norv Turner. Chudzinski's system thrives on constant shifts and formation changes to create mismatches, but there is a big dose of old school as well. Power back Jamal Lewis hammers away behind lead blocker Lawrence Vickers to set up the passing game. One thing that was lacking was a quick underneath threat, but adding Donte' Stallworth could be the perfect remedy.

Quarterbacks The organization is force-feeding Derek Anderson to, well, everyone. When Savage appeared at a "Browns Backers" event with his entire scouting staff, he went one by one to each man, asking, "Who is our quarterback?" All answered "D.A." like smiling zombies. "See how well I've trained them," Savage said.

Browns fans resist indoctrination. A majority of them would prefer to see Brady Quinn, a popular pick from the moment Savage jumped through hoops to draft him at No. 22 overall in 2007.

The decision-makers are betting Anderson's inconsistencies will smooth out in his second full starting season. They think Anderson's 10-5 record as a starter in 2007 makes him a better bet to take the team to the next level, since Quinn attempted only eight passes as a rookie, all in the season finale. The problem with this is that it slows the progression of Quinn, who arguably is ready now and projects as a better player than Anderson.

Anderson has his positive traits, however. Unusually tall at 6-6, he sees over logjams of bodies and makes quick reads. At his best, Anderson gets in a rhythm and puts defenders on their heels. He has a rocket arm and good accuracy on deep balls. He also struggles to perform outside of his comfort zone. Anderson was only 3-5 in road games last year and played poorly at Arizona and Cincinnati with a playoff berth on the line. His completion percentage (56.5), a concern coming out of college, remains a worry.

5-YEAR WINS TREND

NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	351.3	8
RUSHING	118.4	10
PASSING	232.9	12
SCORING	402	8
PUNT RETURNS	13.5	3
KICK RETURNS	27.0	1
RED ZONE TD %	54.5	12t
TOTAL DEFENSE	359.6	30
AGAINST RUSH	129.5	27
AGAINST PASS	230.1	24
POINTS ALLOWED	382	21
INTERCEPTIONS	17	14t
SACKS	28	26t
TURNOVER DIFF.	-2	19

On one hand, some of the pressure is off. Anderson is in the second year of running Chudzinski's offense, behind a line that has grown up and knows he's the top guy going into training camp. On the other, Quinn is breathing down his neck.

Anderson tries hard to take command, but Quinn is more of a natural leader. While shorter and lacking Anderson's arm strength, he has better touch on short and intermediate passes. Coaches love the way teammates respond to Quinn in practices

and preseason games. On scout-team duty, he always seemed on top of each new offense, got his unit to practice with gusto and gave the defense great looks. If Anderson falters, Quinn will be more than ready to step in. **GRADE: B-**

Running backs » The Browns are in good shape here as long as Lewis stays healthy. If not, Cleveland is in trouble, as backups Jason Wright and Jerome Harrison both have flaws that prevent them from carrying the load.

Lewis finished the year looking like the big, fast, punishing back he once was in Baltimore. Spurred by a commanding finish to the season, he rushed for 1,304 yards, fifth in the league and easily his best number since leading the NFL with a stunning 2,066 yards in 2003.

He'll work behind a line that came together last year and could reach elite status this year. Bone spurs and discontentment with Baltimore's offense made Lewis look like a fading player in 2006. Surgery to remove the spurs helped a lot, as did a fresh start with a team whose offense mixes up formations to discourage stacking the box. As he regained his form, the 5-11, 245-pound Lewis hit holes with a wallop and brought some of the toughness that had been absent in the expansion era. He turns 29 in August. That's an age when tailbacks can erode, but his second half last year left the expectation that he has at least one big season left.

Wright broke through with his best season as a fourth-year pro. He has average size, speed and athleticism, but great intelligence. Harrison is a quick home-run threat. He got carries in only four games last year but had at least one 10-yard run in each. Harrison averaged 6.2 yards on 23 carries, and it would be foolish not to find more work for him. Lawrence Vickers is a big, athletic fullback who emerged as a strong lead blocker and legitimate threat to do damage on inside runs and as an outlet receiver. Full of confidence, he has quickly become one of the league's top fullbacks. **GRADE: B**

Receivers » Edwards and tight end Winslow, both top-10 picks in 2004 and '05, respectively, broke through as Pro Bowl selections last season. Veteran Joe Jurevicius was miscast as the No. 2 wideout in 2007, but now that Stallworth has been added, he can slide to his ideal role as a No. 3. With steady veteran Steve Heiden serving as a solid No. 2 tight end behind Winslow and explosive Joshua Cribbs looming as an X-factor at wideout, this could be a dangerous group this season.

Even though they were feeling their way through a new offense with a new quarterback, Edwards and Winslow set single-season franchise records for receiving yards by a wideout and tight end, respectively. **GRADE:A**

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

	OFFENSE	
QB	Derek Anderson	Brady Quinn
FB	Lawrence Vickers	Charles Ali
RB	Jamal Lewis	Jason Wright
WR	Donté Stallworth	Joe Jurevicius
WR	Braylon Edwards	Joshua Cribbs
TE	Kellen Winslow	Steve Heiden
LT	Joe Thomas	Kevin Shaffer
LG	Eric Steinbach	Rex Hadnot
C	Hank Fraley	Lennie Friedman
RG	Ryan Tucker	Seth McKinney
RT	Kevin Shaffer	Ryan Tucker

	DEFENSE	
LE	Corey Williams	Shaun Smith
NT	Shaun Smith	Ahtyba Rubin
RE	Shaun Rogers	Robaire Smith
OLB	Willie McGinest	Antwan Peek
ILB	Andra Davis	Leon Williams
ILB	D'Qwell Jackson	Beau Bell
OLB	Kamerion Wimbley	David McMillan
LCB	Eric Wright	Gary Baxter
SS	Sean Jones	Nick Sorensen
FS	Brodney Pool	Mike Adams
RCB	Brandon McDonald	Daven Holly

	SPECIALISTS
K	Phil Dawson
P	Dave Zastudil
KR	Joshua Cribbs
PR	Joshua Cribbs
LS	Ryan Pontbriand

BROWNS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1 Clay Matthews *(1978-93)*

His Hall-of-Fame brother, Bruce, is campaigning for him to get bronze-busted. Clay was the defensive glue on three Browns teams that reached AFC title games in the 1980s.

2 Walt Michaels *(1952-61)*

The Browns had nine winning seasons in his 10 years and went to four straight NFL title games (1952-55) at one point.

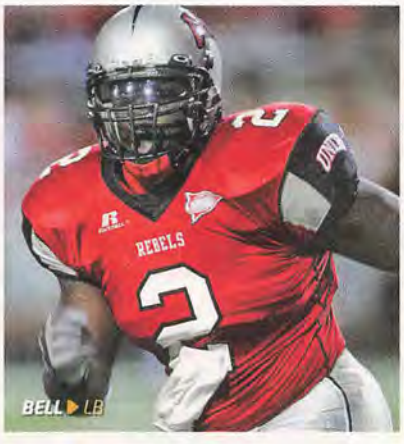
3 Jim Houston *(1960-72)*

A fixture on 1960s teams that had 10 winning seasons and delivered Cleveland's last pro sports championship in 1964.

PAUL JASIENSKI / GETTY IMAGES

» DRAFT REPORT GRADE ▶ B-

The Browns did not pick until the fourth round but still added some quality players who could start in the future. Inside linebacker **Beau Bell** was a certain first-round pick prior to tweaking a knee on the first day of Senior Bowl practices. The injury lingered and caused him to run in the 4.9-range during pre-draft workouts despite timing much faster in the spring of his junior year. Bell is intense and highly competitive with the strength and explosiveness to make plays all over the field. He landed in the perfect situation and could start right off the bat. **Martin Rucker** is a tall and athletic tight end with excellent hands. His route-running, ability to shield defenders, hands and positional blocking remind many of current Jags TE Marcedes Lewis. Massive and incredibly strong NT **Ahtyba Rubin** has all the tools to become a very good starter if he learns to play with leverage and aggression on a more consistent basis. **Paul Hubbard** is a tall receiver with very good straight-line speed. Though not a great athlete, he can stretch the field and reach out and pluck the ball out of the air to make plays downfield. Outside linebacker **Alex Hall** is a raw, developmental pass rusher who fits Cleveland's 3-4 defense well and now must learn to use his athleticism to be as productive in the NFL as he was in Division II.



» 2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
4	5	Bell, Beau	LB	6-3	245	UNLV
4	12	Rucker, Martin	TE	6-6	255	Missouri
6	24	Rubin, Ahtyba	DT	6-3	315	Iowa State
6	25	Hubbard, Paul	WR	6-3	221	Wisconsin
7	24	Hall, Alex	DE	6-4	250	St. Augustine

ROSTER

#	QUARTERBACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
3	Anderson, Derek	QB	6-6	229	06/15/1983	2	Oregon State
11	Dorsey, Ken	QB	6-4	220	04/22/1981	3	Miami (FL)
10	Quinn, Brady	QB	6-3	235	10/27/1984	1	Notre Dame

#	OFFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
57	Bentley, LeCharles	C	6-2	313	11/07/1979	4	Ohio State
66	Fraley, Hank	C	6-2	315	09/21/1977	7	Robert Morris
62	Friedman, Lennie	G	6-3	295	08/13/1976	8	Duke
	Hadnot, Rex	C	6-2	325	01/28/1982	4	Houston
63	Louis, Cliff	T	6-8	300	08/24/1984	0	Morgan State
68	McKinney, Seth	C	6-3	315	06/12/1979	5	Texas A&M
50	Philip, Marvin	C	6-1	307	02/03/1982	0	California
64	Pontbriand, Ryan	C	6-2	250	10/01/1979	5	Rice
77	Shaffer, Kevin	T	6-5	325	03/02/1980	6	Tulsa
61	Sowells, Isaac	G	6-3	324	05/04/1982	1	Indiana
65	Steinbach, Eric	G	6-6	295	04/04/1980	5	Iowa
73	Thomas, Joe	T	6-6	313	12/04/1984	1	Wisconsin
72	Tucker, Ryan	T	6-6	318	06/12/1975	11	TCU

#	RUNNING BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
41	Ali, Charles	RB	6-2	265	08/23/1984	1	Arkansas-Pine Bluff
35	Harrison, Jerome	RB	5-9	210	02/26/1983	2	Washington State
31	Lewis, Jamal	RB	5-11	245	08/26/1979	7	Tennessee
47	Vickers, Lawrence	RB	6-0	252	05/08/1983	2	Colorado
29	Wright, Jason	RB	5-10	214	07/12/1982	4	Northwestern

#	RECEIVERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
85	Cieslak, Brad	TE	6-3	262	07/01/1982	3	Northern Illinois
16	Cribbs, Joshua	WR	6-1	215	06/09/1983	3	Kent State
87	Dinkins, Darnell	TE	6-4	259	01/20/1977	6	Pittsburgh
17	Edwards, Braylon	WR	6-3	212	02/21/1983	3	Michigan
82	Heiden, Steve	TE	6-5	275	09/21/1976	9	South Dakota State
15	Hill, Efrem	WR	6-2	185	07/23/1983	0	Samford
84	Jurevicius, Joe	WR	6-5	232	12/23/1974	10	Penn State
88	Kasper, Kevin	WR	6-1	197	12/23/1977	5	Iowa
83	Sanders, Steve	WR	6-3	201	12/23/1982	0	Bowling Green
18	Stallworth, Donte'	WR	6-0	200	11/10/1980	6	Tennessee
12	Steptoe, Syndric	WR	5-9	170	12/06/1984	0	Arizona
81	Wilson, Travis	WR	6-1	213	02/11/1984	1	Oklahoma
80	Winslow, Kellen	TE	6-4	248	07/21/1983	3	Miami (FL)

#	DEFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
93	Leonard, Louis	DT	6-4	330	07/16/1984	1	Fresno State
97	Pittman, Chase	DE	6-5	273	05/15/1983	0	LSU
60	Purcell, Melila	DE	6-5	266	02/05/1984	0	Hawaii
92	Rogers, Shaun	DT	6-4	340	03/12/1979	7	Texas
73	Smith, Alvin	DT	6-2	322	06/16/1982	0	Oregon State
98	Smith, Robaire	DE	6-4	320	11/15/1977	8	Michigan State
91	Smith, Shaun	DT	6-2	325	08/19/1981	5	South Carolina
79	West, Zach	DT	6-5	305	04/27/1984	0	UTEP
99	Williams, Corey	DT	6-4	313	08/17/1980	4	Arkansas State

#	DEFENSIVE BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
20	Adams, Mike	S	5-11	195	03/24/1981	4	Delaware
23	Baxter, Gary	CB	6-2	210	11/24/1978	6	Baylor
	Cargile, Steve	CB	6-2	210	06/02/1982	2	Columbia
33	Davis, A.J.	CB	5-10	192	05/29/1983	0	North Carolina State
39	Holly, Daven	CB	5-10	185	08/08/1982	3	Cincinnati
26	Jones, Sean	S	6-1	225	03/02/1982	3	Georgia
22	McDonald, Brandon	CB	5-11	184	08/26/1985	1	Memphis
21	Pool, Brodney	S	6-2	208	05/24/1984	3	Oklahoma
28	Sandy, Justin	S	6-0	207	02/22/1982	2	Northern Iowa
27	Sorensen, Nick	S	6-3	205	07/31/1978	7	Virginia Tech
24	Wright, Eric	CB	5-10	195	07/24/1985	1	UNLV
25	Wright, Kenny	CB	6-1	207	09/14/1977	9	Northwestern State

#	LINEBACKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
54	Davis, Andra	LB	6-1	250	12/23/1978	6	Florida
53	Griffin, Kris	LB	6-3	245	05/27/1981	3	Indiana (PA)
52	Jackson, D'Qwell	LB	6-0	240	09/26/1983	2	Maryland
55	McGinest, Willie	LB	6-5	268	12/11/1971	14	USC
90	McMillan, David	LB	6-3	250	09/20/1981	3	Kansas
51	Orr, Shantee	LB	6-0	250	05/28/1981	5	Michigan
56	Peek, Antwan	LB	6-3	255	10/29/1979	5	Cincinnati
94	Williams, Leon	LB	6-2	250	07/30/1983	2	Miami (FL)
95	Wimbley, Kamerion	LB	6-3	260	10/13/1983	2	Florida State

#	KICKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
4	Dawson, Phil	K	5-11	205	01/23/1975	9	Texas
15	Zastudil, Dave	P	6-3	220	10/26/1978	6	Ohio

▶ **ROMEO CRENNEL,** *Head coach*

Rob Chudzinski, off. coord.; **Mel Tucker**, def. coord.; **Ted Daisher**, special teams coord.; **Dave Atkins**, senior off. asst.; **Chris Caminiti**, asst. special teams; **Wes Chandler**, wide receivers; **Mike Haluchak**, linebackers; **Anthony Lynn**, running backs; **Steve Marshall**, off. line; **Richard McNutt**, asst. def. backs; **Randy Melvin**, def. line; **Alfredo Roberts**, tight ends; **Rip Scherer**, asst. head coach/quarterbacks; **Mike Sullivan**, asst. off. line; **Bob Trott**, def. asst.; **Cory Undlin**, def. backs

Offensive line » It's debatable whether the Browns should have spent last year's No. 3 overall pick on Thomas instead of sensational runner Adrian Peterson. However, it's hard to imagine how Peterson could have made a more dramatic improvement than the one that occurred after Thomas was installed at left tackle. He combines top-notch athleticism with textbook footwork and hand position, making it almost impossible for speed rushers to get around him.

Thomas' rapid emergence was assisted by veteran left guard Eric Steinbach, who is on the thin side but plays with great leverage and a mean streak. That duo forms one of the best left sides in the league. Center Hank Fraley has average talent but is a leader whose nonstop hustle and intensity sets the tone. Former Pro Bowler LeCharles Bentley provides competition for Fraley after missing the last two seasons with a patellar tendon injury.

The Browns were in the midst of a 4-1 streak last season before right guard Seth McKinney went down with an injury. He was ably replaced in the final eight games by Ryan Tucker, a career right tackle. With health concerns dogging McKinney and Tucker entering his 12th season, it's reassuring to have added Rex Hadnot, a starter with the Dolphins in recent seasons. Tucker is big and tough—a veteran who loves the game. He isn't quite as good in pass protection as the nimble McKinney, but he's good enough, and the running game came alive last year when Tucker entered the lineup. Kevin Shaffer was less than adequate at the beginning of last season after getting shifted over to right tackle due to the addition of Thomas.

GRADE: B+

DEFENSE

Former defensive coordinator Todd Grantham may have been the man who knew too much. Eager to prove that his defensive intellect was on the level of the boss, he sometimes went his own way without Crennel's blessing. His adjustments sometimes got ahead of the players' ability to execute them, and the fallout cost Grantham his job. Mel Tucker, the defensive backs coach the last three years, takes over. He will be energetic, yet compliant, with Crennel. Ironically, Tucker's application of Crennel's 3-4 scheme will be simpler than Grantham's, but will have greater ability to handle a wide load. Blitzing may increase after it becomes apparent what the newest additions, Rogers and Williams, have to offer.

OFFSEASON MOVES

ADDITIONS:

TE **Brad Cieslak** *(FA/Bills)*, WR **Kevin Kasper** *(FA/Lions)*, DT **Shaun Rogers** *(trade/Lions)*, WR **Donté Stallworth** *(FA/Patriots)*, DT **Corey Williams** *(trade/Packers)*, C **Rex Hadnot** *(FA/Dolphins)*, LB **Shantee Orr** *(FA/Jaguars)*

SUBTRACTIONS:

DE **Orpheus Roye** *(FA)*, WR **Tim Carter** *(FA)*, DE **Simon Fraser** *(FA/Falcons)*, LB **Chaun Thompson** *(FA/Texans)*, DE **Bobby Hamilton** *(FA)*, DB **Ricardo Colclough** *(FA/Panthers)*, T **Nate Dorsey** *(FA)*, NT **Ted Washington** *(FA)*, NT **Ethan Kelley** *(FA)*, LB **Matt Stewart** *(FA/Cardinals)*, LB **Keith Adams** *(FA)*

INSIDE THE HEADSET

ROMEO CRENNEL

Crennel, 61, is the oldest head coach in the NFL and has plenty of old-school philosophies. He coached on Super Bowl teams that played 3-4 defenses under Bill Parcells and Bill Belichick, and he believes in the scheme's run-stifling soul. He preaches toughness, honesty, consistency and teamwork. He is loyal, sometimes to a fault, and has a gambling streak.

HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL MEDIA

FANTASY SPIN

http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football

EDWARDS

DEFENSE/ SPECIAL TEAMS

STALLWORTH

Derek Anderson's breakout '07 campaign (32 total TDs) wasn't a fluke. He's big, strong-armed, loaded with good receivers and has Joe Thomas protecting his blind side.

BUY Braylon Edwards, WR

SELL Defense/special teams

SLEEPER Donté Stallworth, WR

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/09	L	7-34	Pittsburgh Steelers
09/16	W	51-45	Cincinnati Bengals
09/23	L	24-26	at Oakland Raiders
09/30	W	27-13	Baltimore Ravens
10/07	L	17-34	at New England Patriots
10/14	W	41-31	Miami Dolphins
10/28	W	27-20	at St. Louis Rams
11/04	W	33-30	Seattle Seahawks
11/11	L	28-31	at Pittsburgh Steelers
11/18	W	33-30	at Baltimore Ravens
11/25	W	27-17	Houston Texans
12/02	L	21-27	at Arizona Cardinals
12/09	W	24-18	at New York Jets
12/16	W	8-0	Buffalo Bills
12/23	L	14-19	at Cincinnati Bengals
12/30	W	20-7	San Francisco 49ers

WON 10, LOST 6

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Lewis	298	1304	4.4	66t	9
Wright	60	277	4.6	18	1
Harrison	23	142	6.2	17	0
Anderson	32	70	2.2	11	3
Cribbs	9	61	6.8	18	0
Vickers	15	43	2.9	7	0
Frye	1	1	1.0	1	0
Zastudil	2	-3	-1.5	0	0
BROWNS	**440**	**1895**	**4.3**	**66t**	**13**
OPPONENTS	460	2072	4.5	37	8

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Winslow	82	1106	13.5	49	5
Edwards	80	1289	16.1	78t	16
Jurevicius	50	614	12.3	50	3
Lewis	30	248	8.3	34	2
Wright	24	233	9.7	23	0
Vickers	13	91	7.0	25	2
Heiden	12	104	8.7	27	0
Carter	8	117	14.6	22	1
Cribbs	3	37	12.3	18	0
Harrison	2	19	9.5	15	0
Dinkins	1	8	8.0	8	0
BROWNS	**305**	**3866**	**12.7**	**78t**	**29**
OPPONENTS	340	3867	11.4	42	29

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Anderson	527	298	3787	29	19
Frye	10	4	34	0	1
Quinn	8	3	45	0	0
BROWNS	**545**	**305**	**3866**	**29**	**20**
OPPONENTS	578	340	3867	29	17

SACKS BROWNS 28, OPPONENTS 19

Wimbley 5, Peek 4, Smith 4, Williams 4, McGinest 3, Smith 2, Adams 1, Jackson 1, Kelley 1, Thompson 1, Wright 1, Jones 0.5, Roye 0.5

HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL

Defensive line Two proven players in their late 20s, Rogers and Williams replace a pair of worn-out veterans (Orpheus Roye and Ted Washington) as starters along the three-man front. The Browns are paying a fortune to get dramatic results. Together, the new duo should end a vicious cycle of weak run defense while turning the inside pass rush from a whisper to a scream.

Crennel is asking the top four men in the projected rotation—Rogers, Williams, Shaun Smith and Robaire Smith—to learn both end positions and nose tackle. All are veterans with the big bodies and athleticism to do so, which will allow the front to be flexible and surprising.

Rogers and Williams loom as the starting ends, with Shaun Smith emerging as the No. 1 nose tackle. Robaire Smith, the old man on the line at 30, should get an equal share of playing time as the top sub. Ideally, emerging star Louis Leonard will become an effective fifth man. This would ensure enough periodic rest for Rogers to resurface as the player who went to two Pro Bowls with the Lions. Rogers has the size (6-4, 340 pounds) and strength to be a nightmare for opposing offensive linemen this season. **GRADE: B**

Linebackers The success of this unit hinges on outside linebacker Kamerion Wimbley and inside linebacker D'Qwell Jackson, the team's top two picks of the 2006 draft. Wimbley needs to improve as a run defender, along with getting after the quarterback more. His sack total sank from 11 as a rookie to five in 2007. Defenses paid more attention to him, and got away with it because there was no heat coming from the other side. It will help if Antwan Peek rebounds from an injury-plagued year and provides some pressure from the other outside spot. But even if Peek and company post minimal sack numbers, Wimbley should be helped by a much-improved inside rush from the revamped line. **GRADE: B-**

Secondary A lot rides on the gamble that sent the team's top cornerback, Leigh Bodden, to the Lions in the Rogers trade. The Browns will get away with losing him only if second-year players Eric Wright and Brandon McDonald build on strong rookie years. Wright fell to the second round last season because of off-field issues, but kept his nose clean and in the face of receivers. He is fast, fluid and confident. McDonald was a late bloomer at the University of Memphis, and his confidence seems to have built quickly in the pros. McDonald is fast and athletic, but he must prove he can consistently hang with veteran wideouts. If McDonald falters early in the season, he could be passed by Daven Holly, who has been inconsistent as a spot starter but has two key traits: cockiness and a short memory. Sean Jones and Brodney Pool shape up as a good-but-not-great safety tandem, and both underperformed last year. **GRADE: C**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Cribbs was arguably the Browns' 2007 MVP by virtue of the ferocious tone he set on special teams. He generates raw electricity on kick returns, showing the instincts that made him a great running quarterback at Kent State. And for all the accolades given to Devin Hester, Cribbs bested the Bears' star 30.7 to 21.7 in yards per kick return last year. Phil Dawson is a 10th-year veteran who has a knack for making big kicks, most notably a 51-yard bank shot last year that forced a memorable overtime at Baltimore. He has average leg strength on kickoffs but is an elite directional kicker who can look like a trick-shot artist in practice. Punter Dave Zastudil struggled with a back injury last year. He wasn't as effective as Scott Player, who replaced him for a few games, but has the talent and experience to be solid. **GRADE: A-**

BOTTOM LINE

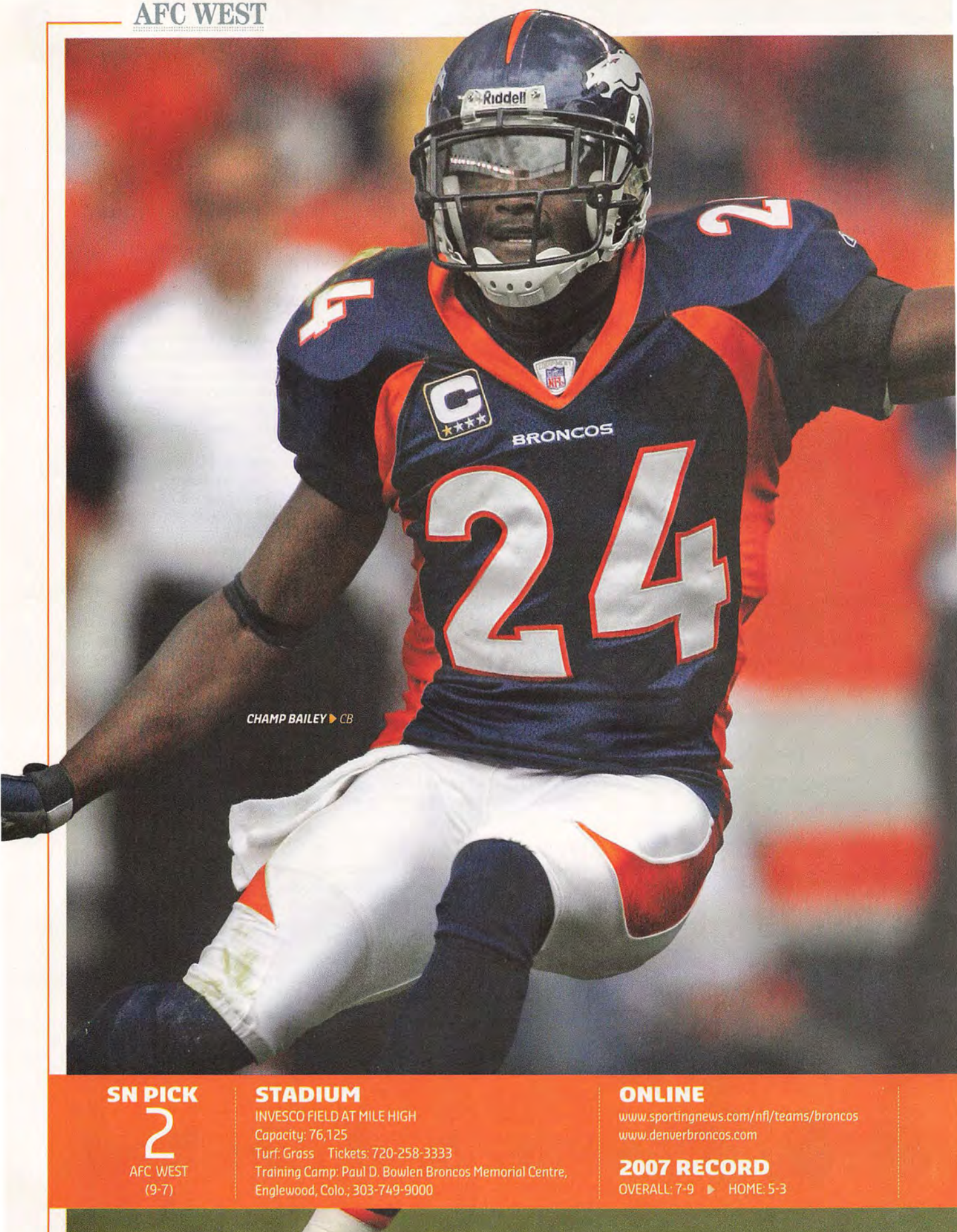
Crennel is under no less pressure than he was a year ago. It's simply a different kind of heat. Last season, his job was on the line after a record of 10-22 during his first two years. Now, coming off a 10-6 breakthrough and with key additions to the defense, anything less than the team's first playoff berth since 2002 would be a disappointment.

85

FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT

UP



CHAMP BAILEY ▶ CB

SN PICK

2

AFC WEST
(9-7)

STADIUM

INVESCO FIELD AT MILE HIGH
Capacity: 76,125
Turf: Grass Tickets: 720-258-3333
Training Camp: Paul D. Bowlen Broncos Memorial Centre, Englewood, Colo.; 303-749-9000

ONLINE

www.sportingnews.com/nfl/teams/broncos
www.denverbroncos.com

2007 RECORD

OVERALL: 7-9 ▶ HOME: 5-3

(L TO R): JAY DROWNS / SN; JULIE SCHEIDEGGER / US PRESSWIRE; HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL MEDIA

DENVER BRONCOS

Shanahan hopes housecleaning takes bitter taste of 2007 campaign away

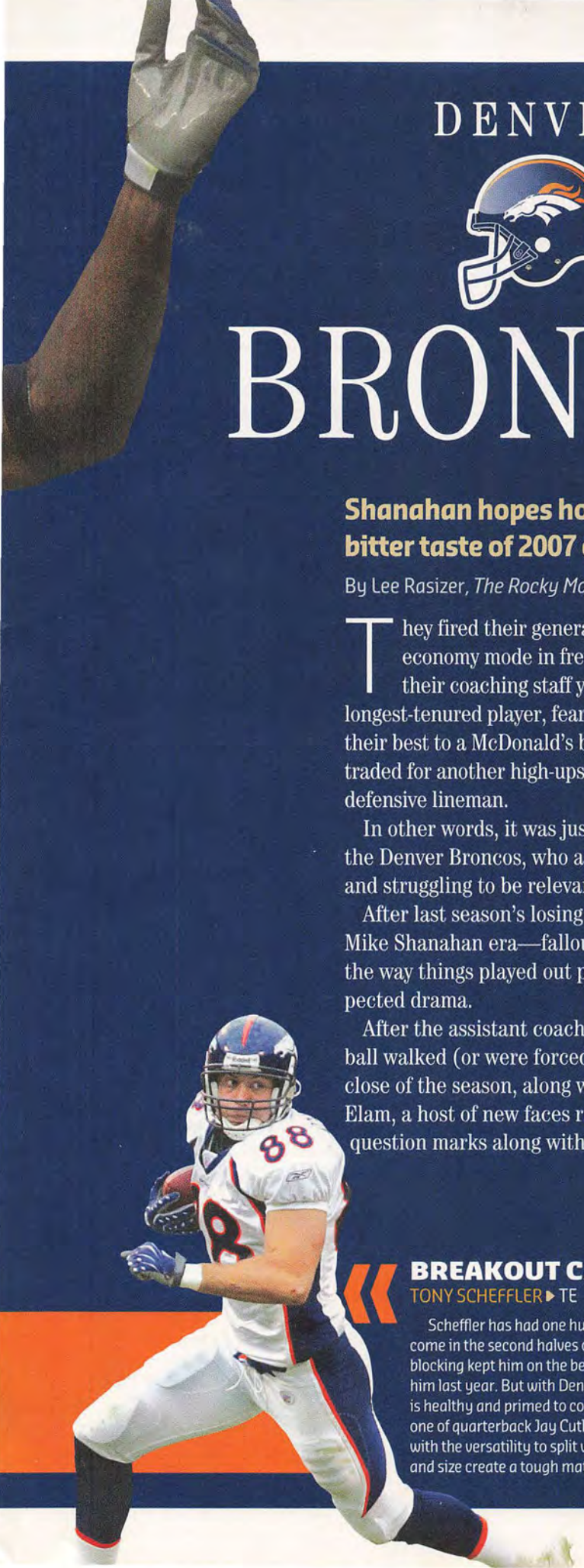
By Lee Rasizer, *The Rocky Mountain News*

They fired their general manager, went into economy mode in free agency and shook up their coaching staff yet again. They lost their longest-tenured player, feared they'd lost arguably their best to a McDonald's bag, of all things, and traded for another high-upside, higher-risk veteran defensive lineman.

In other words, it was just another offseason for the Denver Broncos, who are never dull off the field and struggling to be relevant again on it.

After last season's losing record—the first of the Mike Shanahan era—fallout seemed inevitable. But the way things played out presented some unexpected drama.

After the assistant coaches from both sides of the ball walked (or were forced) out the door at the close of the season, along with longtime kicker Jason Elam, a host of new faces rushed in, bringing some question marks along with them.

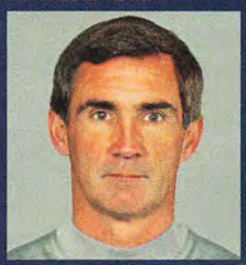


BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

TONY SCHEFFLER ▸ TE

Scheffler has had one huge season. Unfortunately, it has come in the second halves of each of his first two seasons. His blocking kept him on the bench as a rookie. A foot injury slowed him last year. But with Denver loading up at wideout, Scheffler is healthy and primed to contribute from Day One. He's already one of quarterback Jay Cutler's favorite red-zone targets. And with the versatility to split wide in spread formations, his speed and size create a tough matchup for linebackers and safeties.

INSIDE THE HEADSET



MIKE SHANAHAN

Mike Shanahan is a gambler at heart. He has confidence in his running game's ability to squeeze out short-yardage gains to move the chains, despite an undersized front. He will take his chances on fourth down more than most, even inside his own territory.

OFFSEASON MOVES

ADDITIONS:

WR **Derrick Hamilton** *(FA/49ers)*, LB **Brandon Archer** *(FA/Colts)*, LB **William Kershaw** *(FA/Texans)*, WR **Keary Colbert** *(FA/Panthers)*, LB **Niko Koutouvides** *(FA/Seahawks)*, LB **Boss Bailey** *(FA/Lions)*, DB **Marquand Manuel** *(FA/Panthers)*, DB **Marlon McCree** *(FA/Chargers)*, C **Casey Wiegmann** *(FA/Chiefs)*, WR **Samie Parker** *(FA/Chiefs)*, WR **Darrell Jackson** *(FA/49ers)*, DT **Dewayne Robertson** *(trade/Jets)*

SUBTRACTIONS:

WR **Carlton Brewster** *(FA/Saints)*, WR **Javon Walker** *(FA/Broncos)*, DE **Ebenezer Ekuban** *(FA/Raiders)*, DB **Nick Ferguson** *(FA/Texans)*, OLB **Ian Gold** *(FA)*, TE **Stephen Alexander** *(FA)*, K **Jason Elam** *(FA/Falcons)*, DT **Antwon Burton** *(FA/Bengals)*

The Broncos added linebackers Boss Bailey and Niko Koutouvides, safeties Marquand Manuel and Marlon McCree and receivers Keary Colbert, Darrell Jackson and Samie Parker. Underachieving defensive tackle Dewayne Robertson made his way over in a trade from the Jets as well, but not before failing Denver's team physical (and Cincinnati's before that).

Then rising-star receiver Brandon Marshall put his arm through an entertainment center in an incident somehow involving a wrestling match and fast-food bag, causing him to miss three months of offseason workouts.

Amid all the distractions, one thing remains clear: in the talent department, the Broncos still fall far short to the San Diego Chargers, the reigning division champs, and the rest of the AFC front-runners.

OFFENSE

Mike Heimerdinger, the assistant head coach on offense the last two seasons, bolted for Tennessee because he wanted to call the shots. This reinforces the notion that it's Shanahan who runs the offensive show. Shanahan will get help from Jeremy Bates, considered an up-and-comer, as well as Rick Dennison, but it will be the head coach's fingerprints all over this side of the ball.

The zone-blocking run game remains the foundation. The big question is whether quarterback Jay Cutler, in his second full season as starter, will be turned loose to take advantage of several intermediate pass-catching threats who can do some damage after the catch—and in the red zone, where the running game has struggled.

Quarterbacks » In Cutler, Shanahan has found the grinder he can build his franchise around. Cutler lives and breathes football, as evidenced by a monthlong offseason-workout trek to Atlanta with Marshall and tight end Tony Scheffler. He has the arm to make all the throws and the feet to slide out of trouble. At times, he trusts his arm too much and tries to squeeze the ball into tight spaces when check-downs are the safe option. But Shanahan will take that playmaking mindset over excessive caution any time. Cutler's first full year under center produced few mishaps, a testament to his film study and ability to grasp Denver's complicated passing attack.

This season, though, Cutler will be expected to take the next step and win games rather than simply managing them efficiently. He spent the offseason breaking down his own mechanics, studying opposing defenses and watching film of the NFL's top quarterbacks in hopes of raising his play to the level of game-changer. In backup Patrick Ramsey, Cutler has an experienced sounding board to help with the learning curve. **GRADE: B**

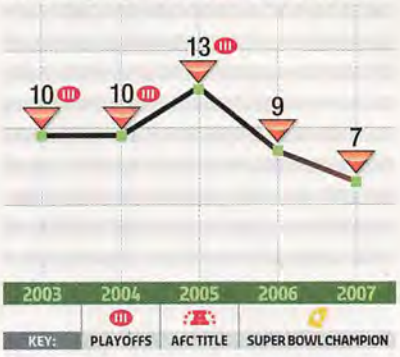
Running backs » At first, Travis Henry and Denver's one-cut-and-go system were the perfect marriage. He began the 2007 season by showing that his physical running style could consistently move the chains, while his top-notch stiff-arm freed him for extra yardage. But Henry's season deteriorated after the first month. A knee injury robbed him of his explosiveness. He became distracted by a squabble with the league over a failed drug test.

During the offseason, Henry worked to convince the club that he can be relied upon both mentally and physically. While there isn't complete trust in Henry as the full-time answer, Denver did bypass talented running backs Jonathan Stewart and Rashard Mendenhall in the first round of the draft.

The one bright side of Henry's troubles last season was that they opened the door for undrafted rookie Selvin Young. He proved to be a heady player who thrives in the open field and now fits into the team's long-term plans. The club is also high on another young back, Andre Hall, whose compact frame and shifty running style call to mind ex-Bronco Quentin Griffin. **GRADE: C+**

Receivers » Marshall had a true breakout season, proving nearly impossible to take down on first contact.

5-YEAR WINS TREND



NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	346.3	11
RUSHING	122.3	9
PASSING	224.0	13
SCORING	320	21
PUNT RETURNS	9.1	14
KICK RETURNS	22.3	18
RED ZONE TD %	49.0	21
TOTAL DEFENSE	336.0	19
AGAINST RUSH	142.6	30
AGAINST PASS	193.4	7
POINTS ALLOWED	409	28
INTERCEPTIONS	14	23t
SACKS	33	16t
TURNOVER DIFF.	+1	13t

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

	OFFENSE	
QB	Jay Cutler	Patrick Ramsey
FB	Cecil Sapp	Peyton Hillis
RB	Travis Henry	Selvin Young
WR	Brandon Marshall	Darrell Jackson
WR	Keary Colbert	Brandon Stokley
TE	Daniel Graham	Tony Scheffler
LT	Ryan Clady	Ryan Harris
LG	Ben Hamilton	Kory Lichtensteiger
C	Tom Nalen	Casey Wiegmann
RG	Montrae Holland	P.J. Alexander
RT	Chris Kuper	Erik Pears

	DEFENSE	
LE	Ebenezer Ekuban	Tim Crowder
LT	Marcus Thomas	Steven Harris
RT	Dewayne Robertson	Alvin McKinley
RE	Jarvis Moss	Elvis Dumervil
SLB	Boss Bailey	Nate Webster
MLB	Niko Koutouvides	Jordan Beck
WLB	D.J. Williams	Jamie Winborn
LCB	Champ Bailey	Karl Paymah
SS	John Lynch	Marlon McCree
FS	Hamza Abdullah	Marquand Manuel
RCB	Dre' Bly	Domonique Foxworth

	SPECIALISTS	
K	Matt Prater	
P	Sam Paulescu	
KR	Eddie Royal	
PR	Eddie Royal	
LS	Mike Leach	

FANTASY SPIN

http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football

CUTLER HENRY YOUNG

After having a breakout '07, Brandon Marshall's offseason included forearm surgery. Denver is optimistic he'll be ready for '08, but Marshall suffered nerve damage and is a risky pick.

$ BUY » Jay Cutler, QB

SELL » Travis Henry, RB

Z SLEEPER » Selvin Young, RB

(L TO R): DAVID DUROCHIK FOR SN; HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL (2)

DRAFT REPORT GRADE ▶ B

The Broncos needed a left tackle to replace Matt Lepsis and were thrilled when OT **Ryan Clady** fell to No. 12. While not huge, Clady has good height, long arms and rare athleticism. He meshes well with Denver's blocking scheme and should start as a rookie. **Eddie Royal** is both a dangerous returner and a good wideout who provides insurance as Brandon Marshall recovers from an arm injury. Royal's quickness and burst make him a threat to score whenever he gets the ball in the open field. **Kory Lichtensteiger** is a quick-footed and well-built center whose athleticism makes him a good fit for Denver's offense. He will not play early but should eventually find time. **Jack Williams** is a short but fast and explosive cornerback who plays with a tough and aggressive mentality that is hard to find. **Ryan Torain** would have been selected higher if not for a foot injury; he fits the mold of a good one-cut running back. **Carlton Powell** is an athletic defensive tackle with the size and strength to dominate the point of attack, but he must play with better leverage and greater intensity to become more than a backup. Tough and athletic ILB **Spencer Larsen** flies around the field and makes more plays than expected. While best suited for a reserve role, players like Larsen often end up starting down the road. **Joshua Barrett** is a big, physical safety who can make plays all over the field, but he must be more aggressive in attacking the line of scrimmage in run support in order to start. Fullback **Peyton Hillis** was a seventh-round steal who will start down the road.

2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
1	12	Clady, Ryan	T	6-6	319	Boise State
2	11	Royal, Eddie	WR	5-10	180	Virginia Tech
4	9	Lichtensteiger, Kory	C	6-3	300	Bowling Green
4	20	Williams, Jack	CB	5-9	186	Kent State
5	4	Torain, Ryan	RB	6-1	213	Arizona State
5	13	Powell, Carlton	DT	6-2	293	Virginia Tech
6	17	Larsen, Spencer	LB	6-1	240	Arizona
7	13	Barrett, Josh	S	6-2	223	Arizona State
7	20	Hillis, Peyton	RB	6-1	240	Arkansas

He became Cutler's go-to target and ranked second in the league with 549 yards after the catch. This made Javon Walker expendable, though Marshall lacks explosive speed and must become more of a red-zone presence. Marshall's biggest question mark now is his health, as his right arm suffered nerve damage in the offseason accident. While Marshall is expected to be ready for training camp, questions linger about whether his hand will return to full strength.

Brandon Stokley, coming off an Achilles injury with Indianapolis, was better than anticipated as a third-down weapon. But the club wants to keep him fresh and in his natural slot position in three-wide sets. So Denver signed a slew of receivers in an effort to replace Walker, who became disgruntled with his role as the No. 2 wideout and was released. Colbert and Jackson have the best chances of making an impact. But the entire receiving corps still lacks the deep speed to keep defenses honest. Parker has that potential, but must show that he can consistently catch the ball and run effective intermediate routes. Denver also drafted speedy Virginia Tech wideout Eddie Royal in the second round, and he'll initially back up Stokley.

Tight end is a team strength. Daniel Graham is among the league's best blockers at the position but hasn't earned trust as a pass catcher. Scheffler filled that void effectively in the second half of last season. **GRADE: B-**

Offensive line The Broncos are a team in transition up front, with few sure things. Center Tom Nalen is coming off a torn biceps. Guard Ben Hamilton missed all of 2007 with post-concussion symptoms. Left tackle Matt Lepsis retired. The only sure thing heading into the draft was that Montrae Holland would be a fixture at right guard. The state of flux became official

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE *(an opponent breaks down the Broncos)*

"They've done one of the things that they need to do, and that's get a quarterback (in Jay Cutler) who can play the game. He's young, but he's talented. I like his upside. The kid played at a school (Vanderbilt) where he was the main cog, and he developed some bad habits that had to be unlearned, as far as going from a gunslinger and shooting from the hip, then going to Denver's more refined system. But he certainly has the tools to do it. ...

"They always run the ball relatively well with the scheme there. They addressed their need at left tackle (in the first round of the draft) with the Ryan Clady kid. That's going to help. ...

"Overall, I see them kind of similar to the Houston Texans, who were an 8-8 team last year and maybe a couple plays away from 10 wins. I see the Broncos in that same ballpark. If everything lines up for them—(Travis) Henry's healthy, the quarterback ascends and they're able to get that young kid at left tackle performing and somebody emerges opposite (Brandon) Marshall—they can be productive."

DALE ZANINE / US PRESSWIRE

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1	@ Oakland	SEPT. 8 10:15	W / L
WEEK 2	San Diego	SEPT. 14 4:15	W / L
WEEK 3	New Orleans	SEPT. 21 4:05	W / L
WEEK 4	@ Kansas City	SEPT. 28 1:00	W / L
WEEK 5	Tampa Bay	OCT. 5 4:05	W / L
WEEK 6	Jacksonville	OCT. 12 4:05	W / L
WEEK 7	@ New England	OCT. 20 8:30	W / L
WEEK 8	*OPEN DATE*		
WEEK 9	Miami	NOV. 2 4:05	W / L
WEEK 10	@ Cleveland	NOV. 6 8:15	W / L
WEEK 11	@ Atlanta	NOV. 16 1:00	W / L
WEEK 12	Oakland	NOV. 23 4:05	W / L
WEEK 13	@ New York Jets	NOV. 30 1:00	W / L
WEEK 14	Kansas City	DEC. 7 4:05	W / L
WEEK 15	@ Carolina	DEC. 14 1:00	W / L
WEEK 16	Buffalo	DEC. 21 4:05	W / L
WEEK 17	@ San Diego	DEC. 28 4:15	W / L

SCORE

**Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.*

when the Broncos drafted Ryan Clady 12th overall and immediately named him the starter at left tackle. This goes against Denver's learn-for-a-year philosophy, but desperate times call for desperate measures.

Even when completely healthy, the Broncos struggled with big, physical fronts. The team is slowly moving away from the smaller, quicker model that served it so well in the past to combat the ever-growing front fours every NFL offensive line now faces. Despite the addition of Clady, the biggest problem still lies on the outside. Denver drafted Ryan Harris last year as a future left-tackle prospect. He is smart and athletic but had his second back surgery last year and didn't even play a preseason snap. Erik Pears works hard but is limited physically at right tackle. That may give Chris Kuper, who started at guard in Hamilton's place last season, the edge over Harris and Pears at right tackle. **GRADE: C-**

DEFENSE

This group was a mess in 2007. Jim Bates didn't have the personnel to fit his scheme, especially in the front seven, resulting in a disastrous showing against the run. Bates, and many of the starters, are now gone. Bob Slowik takes over as coordinator, and he'll employ an eight-man front to try and bring Denver back to its usual top-10 showing against the run. Slowik is well respected by the players, who welcome his ability to break down and explain opposing offenses and adjust on the fly. His aggressive mindset should be a boon to the likes of Robertson, sophomore defensive tackle Marcus Thomas and weakside linebacker D.J. Williams, who thrive while playing in attack mode.

THE BOOK ON ... BRANDON MARSHALL *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"Height, weight, speed, strength—he's an imposing figure. He can catch the ball, break tackles and run after the catch. He represents a problem. He's as good as Andre Johnson, who's a Pro Bowl player in Houston. He's as good as he wants to be, as far as on the field, with no limitations as far as what he can do. He's the complete package. He's Terrell Owens without the hype, the popcorn and the Sharpies and all that.

"To try and slow him down, I think the best thing to do is get up in his face and hit him before he starts running. But we respect him. When I was talking to my players before we played them, I told them he's the next superstar-in-waiting."

BRONCOS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1 Tom Jackson *(1973-86)*

After he slipped to the fourth round of the 1973 draft because of his 5-11, 220-pound stature, "Tiny Tom" etched his name into the Denver record books.

2 Randy Gradishar *(1974-83)*

Teamed with Tom Jackson on the "Orange Crush" defense. Had a nose for the football (20 picks) and end zone (4 TDs) and made 2,049 career tackles.

3 Karl Mecklenburg *(1983-94)*

Drafted 310th overall in 1983, Mecklenburg now ranks second in club history with 79.5 sacks, averaging more than half a sack per start (141).

Defensive line Last season's problems started with the front four—too much flux, too much inexperience. Square pegs in rounds holes. The Broncos are banking on incremental improvement from sophomores Tim Crowder, Jarvis Moss and Marcus Thomas, along with a change to a more penetrating scheme.

The situation looks hopeful at end. Elvis Dumervil is a tremendous pass rusher and arguably the team's top lineman, but he was miscast as a full-time starter and would be better served as a rotational pass rusher. Ebenezer Ekuban, a strong, big-bodied player on run downs who offers a veteran leadership presence, returns after missing the year with an Achilles tear. Moss, a 2007 first-round pick, battled injuries but is long and has good burst off the snap and must bounce back. Crowder needs technique work but has the physical tools.

There are a number of question marks on the inside. Denver acquired Robertson from the Jets despite concerns over his knees, and the Broncos are counting on him to become a force with a move from nose tackle to his natural three-technique. The other spot is up for grabs. Thomas should pair with Robertson and brings another agile athlete to the middle, but he has to prove he can consistently bottle up the inside. Otherwise, Alvin McKinley has the savvy to start. **GRADE: C-**

Linebackers A team strength not long ago, the linebacking corps will

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/09	W	15-14	at Buffalo Bills
09/16	W	23-20	Oakland Raiders
09/23	L	14-23	Jacksonville Jaguars
09/30	L	20-38	at Indianapolis Colts
10/07	L	3-41	San Diego Chargers
10/21	W	31-28	Pittsburgh Steelers
10/29	L	13-19	Green Bay Packers
11/04	L	7-44	at Detroit Lions
11/11	W	27-11	at Kansas City Chiefs
11/19	W	34-20	Tennessee Titans
11/25	L	34-37	at Chicago Bears
12/02	L	20-34	at Oakland Raiders
12/09	W	41-7	Kansas City Chiefs
12/13	L	13-31	at Houston Texans
12/24	L	3-23	at San Diego Chargers
12/30	W	22-19	Minnesota Vikings

WON 7, LOST 9

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Young	140	729	5.2	50	1
Henry	167	691	4.1	33	4
Hall	44	216	4.9	62t	2
Cutler	44	205	4.7	31	1
Sapp	18	59	3.3	12	2
Marshall	5	57	11.4	24	0
Ramsey	2	6	3.0	4	0
Bell	6	3	0.5	3	0
Walker	2	-3	-1.5	-1	0
Stokley	1	-6	-6.0	-6	0
BRONCOS	**429**	**1957**	**4.6**	**62t**	**10**
OPPONENTS	501	2282	4.6	74t	14

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Marshall	102	1325	13.0	68t	7
Scheffler	49	549	11.2	41	5
Stokley	40	635	15.9	58	5
Young	35	231	6.6	24	0
Walker	26	287	11.0	24	0
Graham	24	246	10.3	28	2
Martinez	14	175	12.5	23	0
Sapp	14	51	3.6	16	1
Henry	7	65	9.3	21	0
Mustard	5	62	12.4	15	0
Clark	4	23	5.8	7	0
Jackson	3	34	11.3	24	1
Hall	2	69	34.5	65	0
Bell	1	7	7.0	7	0
BRONCOS	**326**	**3759**	**11.5**	**68t**	**21**
OPPONENTS	279	3297	11.8	82t	25

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Cutler	467	297	3497	20	14
Ramsey	48	29	262	1	1
BRONCOS	**515**	**326**	**3759**	**21**	**15**
OPPONENTS	458	279	3297	25	14

SACKS **BRONCOS 33, OPPONENTS 32**

Dumervil 12.5, Crowder 4, Mallard 3.5, McKinley 2.5, Gold 2, Bly 1, Engelberger 1, Lynch 1, Moss 1, Peterson 1, Williams 1, Winborn 0.5

JAY DROWNS / SN

undergo a much-needed overhaul. D.J. Williams' one-year experiment in the middle is over. Despite finishing second in the NFL with 141 tackles, he wasn't a natural at shedding blocks and will change positions yet again. The weak side allows him to use his instincts and flow to the ball while matching up with running backs in pass coverage. Williams takes over for the departed Ian Gold, who struggled last year.

Boss Bailey replaces Nate Webster on the strong side and will be charged with slowing some of the best tight ends in the game within the AFC West. He must also protect the edge—a problem last season against the run. Bailey has tremendous athleticism but struggles to stay healthy. The biggest question mark is at middle linebacker, where Koutouvides gets his first opportunity to start after being stuck behind Lofa Tatupu in Seattle. **GRADE: C-**

Secondary » Champ Bailey, by his own lofty standards, had a down year in 2007 with just three interceptions. But teams had the luxury of staying away from him by either leaning on the run or picking on cohort Dre' Bly. Bailey remains a premier player at his position, with incredible change-of-direction and run-support skills. Bly had an inconsistent first season with the Broncos, though a spotty pass rush contributed to his woes. Denver got what it bargained for in Bly—a gambler who will get beat at times but come through with a big pick at others. Denver has decent depth with Karl Paymah and Domonique Foxworth as backups.

There is uncertainty on the back end, however. John Lynch took a pay cut and won't be handed a starting job in his 16th pro season. He can still thump between the tackles in run support but lacks range. McCree, and perhaps Manuel, will give him a fight. The best bet to start is strong safety Hamza Abdullah, who shows good sideline-to-sideline coverage ability but has only eight games of first-team experience. **GRADE: B-**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Last season, four of Denver's seven wins came on Jason Elam field goals. But the Broncos let their star kicker, who made every kick under 40 yards over the last two years, sign with the Atlanta Falcons. Matt Prater, who had a brief stop with the Falcons, has a huge leg on kickoffs but must show that he won't spray the ball on field goals. He'll likely compete against a veteran to be named after Denver missed out on Olindo Mare (Seattle) and kicked the tires on both John Carney and Mike Vanderjagt. The situation is just as clouded at punter. Sam Paulescu and Danny Baugher are both inexperienced, but the failed Todd Sauerbrun experiment forced Denver's hand. The Broncos moved to solve their annual lack of an explosive returner by picking Royal in the second round of the draft. He has 4.39 speed and the ability to be a gamebreaker. He will man both return spots right off the bat. **GRADE: D+**

BOTTOM LINE

The Broncos are a franchise in transition, trying to fortify their core through a draft that has often failed them while moving away from the high-priced free agents that frequently burn them. There are some building blocks, but the team still has too many question marks along its fronts on both sides of the ball to be considered among the AFC's elite.

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FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT

STEADY

ROSTER

#	QUARTERBACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
6	Cutler, Jay	QB	6-3	233	04/29/1983	2	Vanderbilt
8	Finnerty, Cullen	QB	6-2	223	08/18/1982	0	Grand Valley State
4	Hackney, Darrell	QB	6-1	235	08/07/1983	0	UAB
11	Ramsey, Patrick	QB	6-3	225	02/14/1979	6	Tulane

#	OFFENSIVE LINE	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
69	Alexander, P.J.	G	6-4	297	12/23/1978	3	Syracuse
50	Hamilton, Ben	G	6-4	290	08/18/1977	5	Minnesota
74	Harris, Ryan	T	6-5	300	03/11/1985	1	Notre Dame
70	Holland, Montrae	G	6-2	322	05/21/1980	5	Florida State
73	Kuper, Chris	G	6-4	302	12/19/1982	2	North Dakota
66	Nalen, Tom	C	6-3	286	05/13/1971	14	Boston College
64	Pears, Erik	T	6-8	305	06/25/1982	2	Colorado State
72	Snell, Isaac	G	6-6	288	11/04/1981	0	North Dakota State
62	Wiegmann, Casey	C	6-2	285	07/20/1973	11	Iowa

#	RUNNING BACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
30	Bell, Mike	RB	6-0	225	04/23/1983	2	Arizona
23	Hall, Andre	RB	5-10	212	08/20/1982	1	South Florida
20	Henry, Travis	RB	5-9	230	10/29/1978	7	Tennessee
37	Sapp, Cecil	RB	5-11	229	12/23/1978	5	Colorado State
35	Young, Selvin	RB	6-0	210	10/01/1983	1	Texas

#	RECEIVERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
13	Colbert, Keary	WR	6-1	200	05/21/1982	4	USC
89	Graham, Daniel	TE	6-3	257	11/16/1978	6	Colorado
82	Jackson, Darrell	WR	5-11	206	12/06/1978	8	Florida
81	Jackson, Nate	TE	6-3	235	06/04/1979	5	Menlo
19	Jacobs, Taylor	WR	6-0	210	05/30/1981	5	Florida
83	Leach, Mike	TE	6-2	240	10/18/1976	8	William & Mary
15	Marshall, Brandon	WR	6-4	230	03/23/1984	2	UCF
17	Martinez, Glenn	WR	6-2	183	11/30/1981	2	Saginaw Valley
16	McDaniel, Marquay	WR	5-10	205	04/20/1984	0	Hampton
85	Mustard, Chad	TE	6-6	265	10/08/1977	4	North Dakota
12	Parker, Samie	WR	5-11	190	03/25/1981	4	Oregon
84	Pierce, Brett	TE	6-5	250	01/07/1981	2	Stanford
	Russell, Clifford	WR	5-11	190	02/08/1979	4	Utah
88	Scheffler, Tony	TE	6-5	250	02/15/1983	2	Western Michigan
	Shepherd, Edell	WR	6-1	175	05/18/1980	3	San Jose State
14	Stokley, Brandon	WR	5-11	192	06/23/1976	9	Louisiana-Lafayette

#	DEFENSIVE LINE	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
77	Birdine, Larry	DE	6-4	265	10/06/1983	0	Oklahoma
95	Bozeman, Michael	DT	6-2	290	12/09/1982	0	Mississippi
90	Carrington, Paul	DE	6-7	260	11/10/1982	1	UCF
78	Clemons, Nic	DE	6-6	298	02/03/1980	1	Georgia
96	Crowder, Tim	DE	6-4	275	06/30/1985	1	Texas
92	Dumervil, Elvis	DE	5-11	260	01/19/1984	2	Louisville
91	Ekuban, Ebenezer	DE	6-3	275	05/29/1976	8	North Carolina
60	Engelberger, John	DE	6-4	260	10/18/1976	8	Virginia Tech
92	Hall, Carlos	DE	6-4	259	01/16/1979	4	Arkansas
68	Harris, Steven	DT	6-5	285	08/14/1984	1	Florida
75	Jenkins, Julian	DT	6-3	276	10/25/1983	1	Stanford
98	Mallard, Josh	DE	6-2	259	03/21/1979	3	Georgia
99	McKinley, Alvin	DT	6-3	294	06/09/1978	8	Mississippi State
94	Moss, Jarvis	DE	6-6	265	08/03/1984	1	Florida
97	Peterson, Kenny	DE	6-3	285	11/21/1978	5	Ohio State
63	Robertson, Dewayne	DT	6-1	317	10/16/1981	5	Kentucky
79	Thomas, Marcus	DT	6-3	315	09/23/1985	1	Florida

#	DEFENSIVE BACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
21	Abdullah, Hamza	S	6-2	216	08/20/1983	3	Washington State
24	Bailey, Champ	CB	6-0	192	06/22/1978	9	Georgia
32	Bly, Dre'	CB	5-10	185	05/22/1977	9	North Carolina
22	Foxworth, Domonique	CB	5-11	180	03/27/1983	3	Maryland
47	Lynch, John	S	6-2	220	09/25/1971	15	Stanford
33	Manuel, Marquand	S	6-0	209	07/11/1979	6	Florida
28	McCree, Marlon	S	5-11	202	03/17/1977	7	Kentucky
25	Morton, Christian	CB	6-0	190	04/28/1981	3	Illinois
41	Paymah, Karl	CB	6-0	195	11/29/1982	3	Washington State
20	Reid, Lamont	CB	5-11	195	05/04/1982	1	North Carolina State
43	Rogers, Roderick	S	6-2	186	09/07/1984	1	Wisconsin
31	Underwood, Marviel	S	5-10	200	02/17/1982	1	San Diego State
34	Vaughn, Vickiel	S	5-11	208	10/24/1983	0	Arkansas

#	LINEBACKERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
	Archer, Brandon	LB	6-0	239	10/30/1983	1	Kansas State
	Bailey, Boss	LB	6-3	235	10/14/1979	4	Georgia
57	Beck, Jordan	LB	6-2	233	04/18/1983	2	Cal Poly
53	Green, Louis	LB	6-3	237	09/23/1979	4	Alcorn State
	Koutouvides, Niko	LB	6-2	238	03/25/1981	4	Purdue
58	Webster, Nate	LB	6-0	232	11/29/1977	8	Miami (FL)
55	Williams, D.J.	LB	6-1	242	07/20/1982	4	Miami (FL)
51	Winborn, Jamie	LB	5-11	242	05/14/1979	7	Vanderbilt

#	KICKERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
9	Baugher, Danny	P	5-10	194	01/24/1984	0	Arizona
2	Paulescu, Sam	P	6-0	189	04/18/1984	1	Oregon State
5	Prater, Matt	K	5-10	180	08/10/1984	1	UCF

▶ **MIKE SHANAHAN,** *Head coach*

Rick Dennison, off. coord./off. line; **Bob Slowik**, def. coord.; **Scott O'Brien**, special teams coord.; **Steve Watson**, associate head coach; **Jeremy Bates**, quarterbacks; **Ronnie Bradford**, def. backs; **Jacob Burney**, def. line; **Keith Burns**, special teams asst.; **Jedd Fisch**, wide receivers; **Bill Johnson**, def. line; **Pat McPherson**, tight ends; **Jim Ryan**, linebackers; **Ryan Slowik**, asst. def. backs; **Bobby Turner**, running backs

HOUSTON TEXANS

Strong division will keep fast-improving Texans from reaching postseason goal

By Megan Manfull, *Houston Chronicle*

The Texans have finally been invited to play on "Monday Night Football." Now they're hoping an invitation to the playoffs comes next.

Houston is coming off the best season in franchise history. The Texans won eight games despite Pro Bowlers Andre Johnson and Ahman Green getting injured. Quarterback Matt Schaub and three starters in the secondary also missed time because of injuries.

Regardless of what misfortunes hit the team this season, nothing less than a winning record will be accepted in Houston. But that won't be easy to accomplish. Three of the Texans' first four games are on the road, and four of their first five contests are against teams that reached the playoffs last season.

The Texans say they are ready to finally take that next step. It'll have to start in the AFC South, where Houston won just one game last season.

"Our goal is to become a playoff team, and we're going to have to be able to step to the plate against teams … week-in and week-out and play good football if we expect to do that," coach Gary Kubiak says.

BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

AMOBI OKOYE ▸ DT

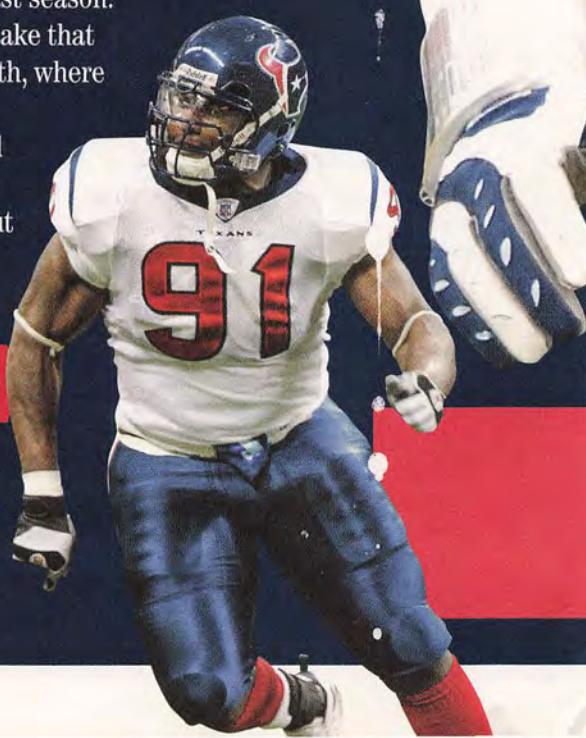
As a rookie, Okoye couldn't have gotten off to a hotter start. He had four sacks in the first five games, but admittedly hit the rookie wall soon after. With a full offseason to regroup and work out, Okoye will harass quarterbacks for the full 16-game slate this season.

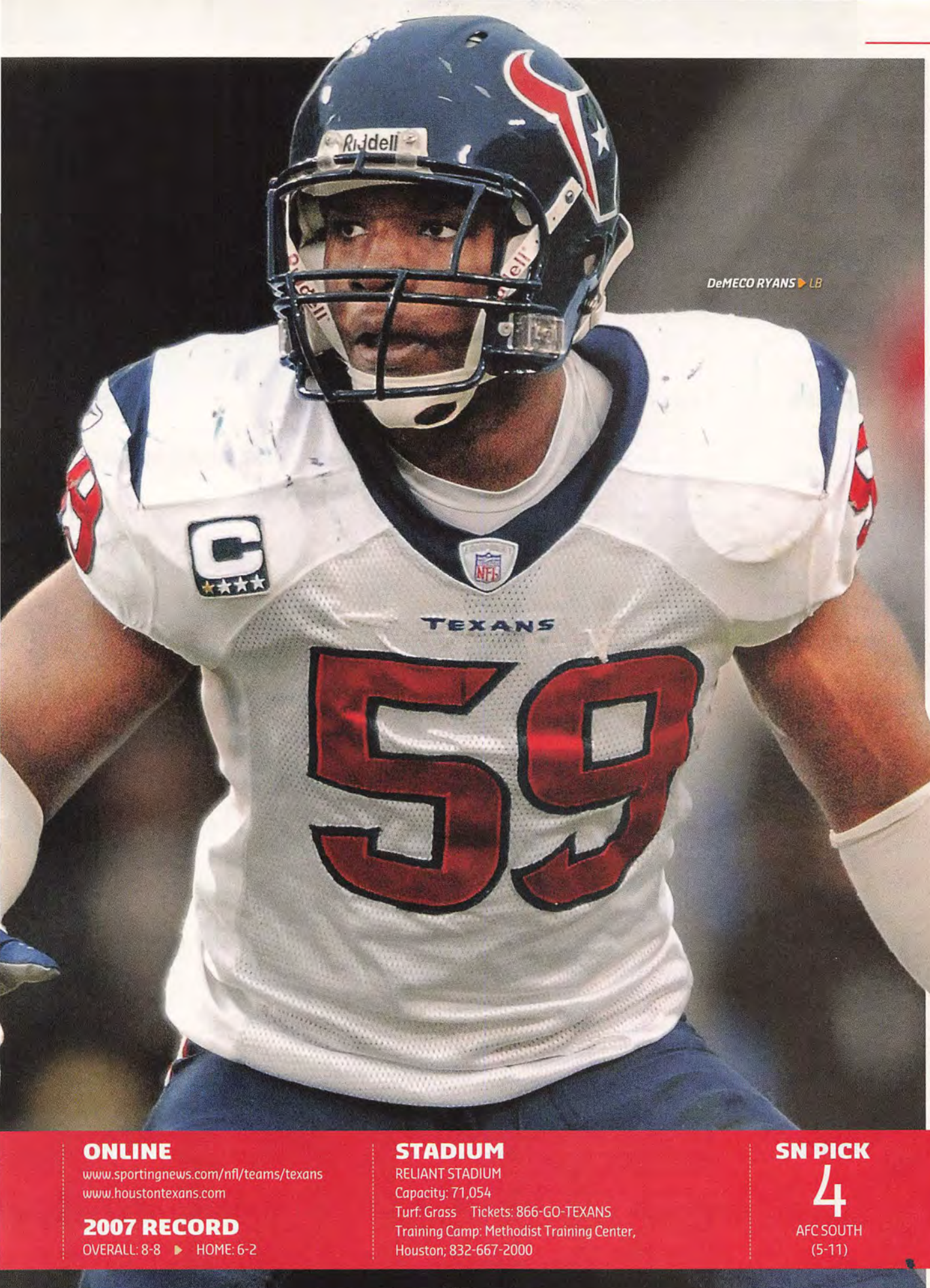
VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE

(an opponent breaks down the Texans)

"The Texans haven't been able to run the ball since (Domanick) Davis gave them a 1,000-yard threat. I know they've had injuries, but their linemen haven't been real effective or real consistent run blockers. Bringing in (new assistant head coach) Alex Gibbs and adding his zone scheme and his toughness will improve their running game more than any player they've signed or drafted. (Sage) Rosenfels is just as good in that system as (Matt) Schaub, and he might be better. You can see Rosenfels has a good feel for what they're doing, and he gets rid of the ball as quick as any quarterback in the league. And I mean after his drop, not his release. The jury's still out on Schaub. He's got a bigger, but slower, release, and he gets hit more because of it. The more they throw the ball, the more shots he's going to take.

"Defensively, they have one pass rusher (end Mario Williams) you have to worry about. You roll or slide the quarterback away from him. With the exception of (DeMeco) Ryans, their linebackers are nothing special. I thought they did a commendable job on defense last year considering injuries, especially to their secondary."





ONLINE

www.sportingnews.com/nfl/teams/texans
www.houstontexans.com

2007 RECORD

OVERALL: 8-8 ▶ HOME: 6-2

STADIUM

RELIANT STADIUM
Capacity: 71,054
Turf: Grass Tickets: 866-GO-TEXANS
Training Camp: Methodist Training Center, Houston; 832-667-2000

SN PICK

4

AFC SOUTH (5-11)

OPPOSITE: BILL BAPTIST / GETTY IMAGES; ABOVE: DAVID DUROCHIK FOR SN

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 @ Pittsburgh
SEPT. 7 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 2 Baltimore
SEPT. 14 | 4:15
— SCORE

WEEK 3 @ Tennessee
SEPT. 21 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 4 @ Jacksonville
SEPT. 28 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 5 Indianapolis
OCT. 5 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 6 Miami
OCT. 12 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 7 Detroit
OCT. 19 | 4:05
— SCORE

WEEK 8 *OPEN DATE*

WEEK 9 @ Minnesota
NOV. 2 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 10 Cincinnati
NOV. 9 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 11 @ Indianapolis
NOV. 16 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 12 @ Cleveland
NOV. 23 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 13 Jacksonville
DEC. 1 | 8:30
— SCORE

WEEK 14 @ Green Bay
DEC. 7 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 15 Tennessee
DEC. 14 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 16 @ Oakland
DEC. 21 | 4:05
— SCORE

WEEK 17 Chicago
DEC. 28 | 1:00
— SCORE

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

THE BOOK ON ... MARIO WILLIAMS *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"Mario was a different player last season. I don't know if it being his second year in the league was the difference or if it was because he was healthy, but whatever the reason, he was a different player. And a much better player. You could see on film he was more sure of himself, much more confident. I think they threw too much at him as a rookie, but last year he was able to handle it. When he moved from right to left end and back, he didn't look uncomfortable—the deer-in-the-headlights look—like his first year. He had the reputation coming in, but he didn't play to his capability. I think he was overcoached, and they put too much on his plate.

"He's such an incredible physical specimen. He's tall. He's got long arms. He gets off the ball fast. He's developing a couple of moves, but he needs to perfect them. He should also develop a couple more. Sometimes he'll let up on a play when he's beaten, especially on a bull rush or if the tackle takes him to the outside."

BOB DONNAN / US PRESSWIRE

OFFENSE

The offense now has 28-year-old Kyle Shanahan as its coordinator, but little will change. The play-calling will continue to go through Kubiak, who wants to use a run-first offense. Injuries to Houston's running backs have thwarted that plan the past two seasons. An improved offensive line and the addition of Alex Gibbs to the coaching staff should help the team make vast improvements, especially in the running game.

Quarterbacks The Texans enter the season with a plethora of talent at this position, which could end up leading to a quarterback controversy.

Kubiak has made it clear that Schaub will return as the team's starter after he missed five starts and left three other games early due to injuries last season. Schaub, who underwent shoulder surgery in the off-season, has good pocket presence and a strong arm. He gets hit too often after making throws, however, leading to concern about his ability to stay healthy.

That's one reason Houston put such a high value on Sage Rosenfels in the offseason and rejected a trade offer from Minnesota. Rosenfels was comfortable in the starting role last season, winning four of his five starts. He threw 15 touchdowns despite playing considerably less than Schaub, who had just nine.

The Texans also plan to carry a third quarterback this season and added Quinn Gray in free agency. They didn't want to be caught without a tested backup if Rosenfels ends up replacing Schaub because of injuries again. Gray has game experience already and should pick up the system quickly. **GRADE: B**

Running backs Injuries have hit the team so hard here that in the past two season finales the Texans were forced to start rookies (Chris Taylor in 2006 and Darius Walker in '07) who had spent the bulk of the season on the practice squad.

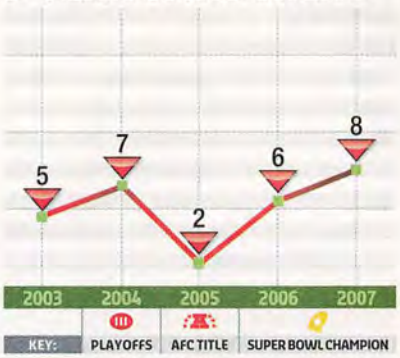
This year, the Texans expect big things from Green, who finished with just 260 rushing yards in 2007 because of an early-season knee injury. Keeping Green healthy is the main concern. He fits well into the Texans' zone-blocking system and is good at making one cut and getting through the hole.

The Texans want to keep Green fresh by utilizing Chris Brown, who enters with an injury-plagued past of his own. Brown will be used to spell Green during games, giving the team a young player with experience as a starter.

In the draft, Houston added Steve Slaton, who brings speed and playmaking ability. Since he can also catch the ball out of the backfield, the Texans plan to use him as their third-down back. Vonta Leach returns at fullback. He excels in this system and works well with Green. **GRADE: B**

Receivers Before going down with a knee injury, Johnson was on pace for a career- and franchise-best season. If he hadn't missed seven starts, he likely could have topped 1,500 receiving yards and scored 14 touchdowns.

5-YEAR WINS TREND



NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	333.6	14
RUSHING	99.1	22
PASSING	234.4	11
SCORING	379	12t
PUNT RETURNS	8.7	18
KICK RETURNS	26.5	2
RED ZONE TD %	60.9	4
TOTAL DEFENSE	344.2	24
AGAINST RUSH	114.1	19
AGAINST PASS	230.1	25
POINTS ALLOWED	384	22t
INTERCEPTIONS	11	30t
SACKS	31	21t
TURNOVER DIFF.	-13	31

When healthy, Johnson was a downfield threat, catching two passes of at least 70 yards. And he punished teams that tried to play him man-to-man. At times, even double coverage didn't work.

In Johnson's absence, however, the Texans learned they had quite a solid receiving corps with Kevin Walter, André Davis, tight end Owen Daniels and rookie Jacoby Jones.

Walter developed into a solid starter, finishing with a career-high 800 receiving yards and four touchdowns. He doesn't have exceptional speed but gets to his spot and catches what is thrown to him. Daniels, who struggled to hold on to the ball last season, recorded 768 receiving yards and three touchdowns.

Davis was the surprise of the season, ranking second in the AFC with 17.7 yards per catch. With just 33 receptions, he gained 583 receiving yards. The team made it a priority to re-sign him in the offseason as the No. 3 receiver.

Jones went through growing pains as a rookie, finishing with 15 catches for 149 yards. The Texans hope to see him develop into a solid receiver during his second year.

Daniels leads the crop of tight ends, while Mark Bruener returns as the primary blocker when Houston goes to two tight ends. Joel Dreessen also earned considerable playing time last season, catching four passes and scoring two touchdowns. **GRADE: A**

Offensive line » The line received two considerable boosts in the offseason with the addition of first-round draft pick Duane Brown and former Denver center Chris Myers. Throw assistant head coach Gibbs into the mix, and the linemen should show clear improvement.

Myers will replace Steve McKinney and Mike Flanagan, neither of whom was re-signed. He adds solid experience and youth to the middle of the line.

Right tackle Eric Winston showed considerable improvement last season, especially as a run blocker. His pass protection remains solid.

Ephraim Salaam has started the past 30 games at left tackle and exceeded expectations the whole way. He has spent the last two seasons filling in for Charles Spencer, who will attempt to make a comeback after 20 months of rehabilitating a serious knee injury. The Texans plan to move Spencer inside to guard, leaving Salaam to compete with Brown for the starting job. Brown's transition should be smooth since he spent his college career in the zone-blocking scheme at Virginia Tech. He's extremely athletic and does well in getting to the second level.

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		
QB	Matt Schaub	Sage Rosenfels
FB	Vonta Leach	Jameel Cook
RB	Ahman Green	Chris Brown
WR	Kevin Walter	Jacoby Jones
WR	Andre Johnson	André Davis
TE	Owen Daniels	Mark Bruener
LT	Ephraim Salaam	Rashad Butler
LG	Chester Pitts	Brandon Frye
C	Chris Myers	Chris White
RG	Fred Weary	Mike Brisiel
RT	Eric Winston	Rashad Butler
DEFENSE		
LE	Anthony Weaver	Earl Cochran
DT	Travis Johnson	Jeff Zgonina
DT	Amobi Okoye	Anthony Maddox
RE	Mario Williams	N.D. Kalu
SLB	Zac Diles	Chaun Thompson
MLB	DeMeco Ryans	Kevin Bentley
WLB	Morlon Greenwood	Xavier Adibi
LCB	Fred Bennett	Jamar Fletcher
FS	Will Demps	Jason Simmons
SS	C.C. Brown	Glenn Earl
RCB	Jacques Reeves	Demarcus Faggins
SPECIALISTS		
K	Kris Brown	
P	Matt Turk	
KR	André Davis	
PR	Jacoby Jones	
LS	Bryan Pittman	

TEXANS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1 » DeMeco Ryans *(2006-present)*

The second-round pick ended up overshadowing classmate Mario Williams and winning Defensive Rookie of the Year.

2 » Jamie Sharper *(2002-04)*

Played the best football of his nine-year career with the Texans, averaging 147 tackles, four sacks and more than two forced fumbles per season.

3 » Kailee Wong *(2002-06)*

Complemented Sharper in the franchise's first linebacking corps and had three interceptions and 5.5 sacks in 2004.

MICHAEL CONROY / AP WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

» DRAFT REPORT GRADE » D+

The Texans surprised many by grabbing OT **Duane Brown** in the first round, but his substantial athleticism clearly suits him for their blocking scheme. He is not a polished blocker, however, and his technique needs significant work. But Brown will develop into the type of starter Houston has in mind if he consistently competes at a high level. The Texans took two big gambles in the third round in CB **Atwaun Molden** and RB **Steve Slaton**. Molden has big-time athleticism but did not play well on a regular basis in college and must prove he has the instincts and ball skills to be productive. Slaton, meanwhile, is small and also more quick than fast. He has not shown the potential to become more than a third-down back in the NFL. Linebacker **Xavier Adibi** flies around the field and could develop into a productive starter who excels in both coverage and chasing down running plays. **Frank Okam** has the natural talent to become a dominating defensive tackle if he learns to play with much better pad level and intensity. Serious concerns about his passion and work ethic dropped him to the fifth round. **Dominique Barber** plays well at safety but lacks the athleticism to start. He should challenge for a backup spot while contributing on special teams. Quarterback **Alex Brink** will not start in the NFL but displays many of the traits of current backup Sage Rosenfels. If Brink impresses, the Texans may show a willingness to trade Rosenfels next offseason.

» 2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
1	26	Brown, Duane	T	6-5	308	Virginia Tech
3	16	Molden, Antwaun	CB	6-2	195	Eastern Kentucky
3	26	Slaton, Steve	RB	5-10	190	West Virginia
4	19	Adibi, Xavier	LB	6-2	236	Virginia Tech
5	16	Okam, Frank	DT	6-5	320	Texas
6	7	Barber, Dominique	S	6-0	210	Minnesota
7	16	Brink, Alex	QB	6-2	212	Washington State

ROSTER

#	QUARTERBACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
7	Boyd, Shane	QB	6-1	232	09/18/1982	0	Kentucky
5	Gray, Quinn	QB	6-3	246	05/21/1979	3	Florida A&M
18	Rosenfels, Sage	QB	6-4	225	03/06/1978	6	Iowa State
8	Schaub, Matt	QB	6-5	237	06/25/1981	4	Virginia

#	OFFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
71	Black, Jordan	T	6-5	310	01/28/1980	4	Notre Dame
65	Brisiel, Mike	G	6-5	300	03/14/1983	1	Colorado State
78	Butler, Rashad	T	6-4	293	02/10/1983	1	Miami (FL)
50	Eslinger, Greg	C	6-3	291	04/23/1983	0	Minnesota
75	Frye, Brandon	T	6-4	302	01/23/1983	0	Virginia Tech
62	Jackson, Scott	G	6-4	300	09/19/1979	0	Brigham Young
55	Myers, Chris	C	6-4	295	09/15/1981	3	Miami (FL)
58	Okobi, Chukky	C	6-1	305	11/18/1978	6	Purdue
48	Pittman, Bryan	C	6-3	270	01/20/1977	5	Washington
69	Pitts, Chester	G	6-3	320	06/26/1979	6	San Diego State
74	Salaam, Ephraim	T	6-7	300	06/19/1976	10	San Diego State
77	Spencer, Charles	T	6-5	351	03/17/1982	1	Pittsburgh
68	Stevenson, Dan	G	6-5	300	10/04/1982	0	Notre Dame
64	Studdard, Kasey	G	6-2	303	07/01/1984	1	Texas
70	Weary, Fred	G	6-4	308	09/30/1977	7	Tennessee
63	White, Chris	C	6-2	285	02/28/1983	2	Southern Miss
73	Winston, Eric	T	6-7	310	11/17/1983	2	Miami (FL)

#	RUNNING BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
47	Abbate, Jon	RB	5-11	245	06/18/1985	1	Wake Forest
33	Beach, Arliss	RB	6-0	220	03/28/1984	0	Kentucky
22	Brown, Chris	RB	6-3	220	04/17/1981	5	Colorado
43	Cook, Jameel	RB	5-10	237	02/08/1979	7	Illinois
30	Green, Ahman	RB	6-0	218	02/16/1977	10	Nebraska
44	Leach, Vonta	RB	6-0	250	11/06/1981	4	East Carolina
27	Taylor, Chris	RB	5-11	220	11/07/1983	1	Indiana
37	Walker, Darius	RB	5-10	208	10/21/1985	1	Notre Dame

#	RECEIVERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
89	Anderson, David	WR	5-10	194	07/28/1983	2	Colorado State
87	Bruener, Mark	TE	6-4	260	09/16/1972	13	Washington
81	Daniels, Owen	TE	6-3	247	11/09/1982	2	Wisconsin
11	Davis, André	WR	6-1	195	06/12/1979	6	Virginia Tech
85	Dreessen, Joel	TE	6-4	260	07/26/1982	2	Colorado State
80	Johnson, Andre	WR	6-3	219	07/11/1981	5	Miami (FL)
12	Jones, Jacoby	WR	6-2	210	07/11/1984	1	Lane
17	McCoy, LeRon	WR	6-1	219	01/24/1982	1	Indiana (PA)
83	Walter, Kevin	WR	6-3	214	08/04/1981	5	Eastern Michigan
86	Williams, Harry	WR	6-2	186	08/10/1982	2	Tuskegee

#	DEFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
93	Bulman, Tim	DT	6-3	300	10/31/1982	2	Boston College
96	Cochran, Earl	DE	6-5	284	04/19/1981	2	Alabama State
99	Johnson, Travis	DT	6-3	305	04/26/1982	3	Florida State
94	Kalu, N.D.	DE	6-3	265	08/03/1975	10	Rice
95	Maddox, Anthony	DT	6-1	295	11/22/1978	4	Delta State
91	Okoye, Amobi	DT	6-2	302	06/10/1987	1	Louisville
97	Powell, Eric	DE	6-3	284	11/16/1979	1	Florida State
97	Robinson, Deljuan	DT	6-3	296	07/01/1984	0	Mississippi State
98	Weaver, Anthony	DE	6-3	280	07/28/1980	6	Notre Dame
90	Williams, Mario	DE	6-7	291	01/31/1985	2	North Carolina State
92	Zgonina, Jeff	DT	6-2	290	05/24/1970	15	Purdue

#	DEFENSIVE BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
20	Alexander, Roc	CB	5-10	190	09/23/1981	5	Washington
32	Bennett, Fred	CB	6-0	197	12/31/1983	1	South Carolina
24	Brown, C.C.	S	6-0	208	01/27/1983	3	Louisiana-Lafayette
40	Cox, Curome	S	6-1	204	02/28/1981	3	Maryland
47	Demps, Will	S	6-0	208	11/07/1979	6	San Diego State
26	Earl, Glenn	S	6-1	215	06/10/1981	3	Notre Dame
38	Faggins, Demarcus	CB	5-10	178	06/13/1979	6	Kansas State
25	Ferguson, Nick	S	5-11	201	11/27/1974	8	Georgia Tech
21	Fletcher, Jamar	CB	5-10	180	08/28/1979	7	Wisconsin
31	Harrison, Brandon	S	6-2	210	04/29/1985	0	Stanford
25	Johnson, Derrick	CB	5-10	188	02/09/1982	2	Washington
42	Mitchell, Brandon	S	6-3	205	10/26/1983	0	Ohio State
35	Reeves, Jacques	CB	5-11	192	10/08/1982	4	Purdue
39	Roberson, Derrick	CB	5-10	175	03/12/1985	0	Rutgers
23	Robinson, Dunta	CB	5-10	174	04/11/1982	4	South Carolina
29	Simmons, Jason	S	5-9	198	03/30/1976	10	Arizona State
25	Wynn, Dexter	CB	5-9	175	02/25/1981	4	Colorado State

#	LINEBACKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
57	Bentley, Kevin	LB	6-0	238	12/29/1979	6	Northwestern
53	Coley, Kevis	LB	6-1	228	06/23/1982	0	Southern Miss
54	Diles, Zac	LB	6-0	240	06/11/1985	1	Kansas State
56	Greenwood, Morlon	LB	6-0	238	07/17/1978	7	Syracuse
59	Ryans, DeMeco	LB	6-2	236	07/28/1984	2	Alabama
51	Thompson, Chaun	LB	6-2	255	05/22/1980	5	West Texas A&M

#	KICKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
3	Brown, Kris	K	5-11	206	12/23/1976	9	Nebraska
1	Turk, Matt	P	6-5	240	06/16/1970	12	Wisconsin-Whitewater

▶ **GARY KUBIAK,** *Head coach*

Alex Gibbs, asst. head coach/offense; **Kyle Shanahan**, off. coord./quarterbacks; **Richard Smith**, def. coord.; **Joe Marciano**, special teams coord.; **John Benton**, off. line; **Chick Harris**, running backs; **Jethro Franklin**, def. line; **Larry Kirksey**, wide receivers; **Brian Pariani**, tight ends; **Jon Hoke**, def. backs; **Johnny Holliland**, linebackers; **Ray Rhodes**, asst. def. backs; **Frank Pollack**, asst. off. line

Chester Pitts will try to stave off younger players for his starting job at left guard. He struggled at the start of last season with consistency, but showed vast improvement after his job was threatened.

Fred Weary returns at right guard after suffering a season-ending leg injury last year. His play was outstanding in pass protection and against the run, however, and he will be fully healthy when training camp begins.

There will be a lot of young players vying for time at guard, including Mike Brisiel, Kasey Studdard and Brandon Frye. **GRADE: C**

DEFENSE

The focus of the defense will once again be the linemen. Mario Williams is coming off his best season, and Amobi Okoye is expected to make big strides from his rookie campaign. With DeMeco Ryans anchoring the middle, the focus will be on just how well defensive coordinator Richard Smith and his assistants can develop a young secondary that will be void of its best player, Dunta Robinson, for at least half the season.

Defensive line » Williams anchors this unit after a strong sophomore campaign in which he finished tied for third in the NFL with 14 sacks. He has great speed and athleticism but still lacks consistency as an every-down lineman.

The Texans hope to see Okoye make similar strides in his second year. Okoye will provide a pass-rush threat in the middle. He has good instincts and very quick feet. However, he wore down last year, and the Texans must find a way to get him through the full 16-game slate.

Travis Johnson still has not lived up to the expectations the Texans had when they drafted him, but he did put together a decent season in 2007. Johnson is strongest against the run.

Anthony Weaver returns to start opposite Williams and plays primarily against the run. He struggles in passing situations, which is why N.D. Kalu usually replaces him as a situational pass rusher. He also adds a positive veteran presence in the locker room.

The Texans will also lean on Anthony Maddox, Jeff Zgonina and Frank Okam. Maddox provides pass-rush ability out of the middle and can make plays on the outside, while Zgonina is a solid veteran who can stop the run.

Okam was drafted to help the Texans against the run. He provides the big body in the middle the team has lacked.

OFFSEASON MOVES

ADDITIONS:

DB **Jacques Reeves** *(FA/Cowboys)*, LB **Kevin Bentley** *(FA/Seahawks)*, RB **Chris Brown** *(FA/Titans)*, LB **Chaun Thompson** *(FA/Browns)*, G **Chris Myers** *(trade/Broncos)*, QB **Quinn Gray** *(FA/Jaguars)*, DB **Nick Ferguson** *(FA/Broncos)*

SUBTRACTIONS:

C **Mike Flanagan** *(FA)*, C **Drew Hodgdon** *(FA)*, TE **Jeb Putzier** *(FA/Seahawks)*, LB **Shawn Barber** *(FA)*, DT **Cedric Killings** *(retired)*, LB **Danny Clark** *(FA/Giants)*, DB **Von Hutchins** *(FA/Falcons)*, DB **Michael Boulware** *(FA/Vikings)*, WR **Jerome Mathis** *(FA/Redskins)*, LB **Charlie Anderson** *(FA/Dolphins)*, G **Steve McKinney** *(FA)*

INSIDE THE HEADSET

GARY KUBIAK

Kubiak isn't a big risk-taker, but he'll surprise opponents at times by going for a fourth-and-short in Houston territory. On game days, he mostly focuses on what he knows best—the offense—and calls the plays. He trusts defensive coordinator Richard Smith to take care of the other side of the ball.

HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL MEDIA

FANTASY SPIN

http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football

JOHNSON

GREEN

DEFENSE/ SPECIAL TEAMS

Matt Schaub (9 TDs, 9 INTs) is too risky because Sage Rosenfels (15, 12) will compete for the starting job. Rosenfels was 4-1 as a starter in Schaub's absence.

BUY Andre Johnson, WR

SELL Ahman Green, RB

SLEEPER Texans' defense/special teams

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/09	W	20-3	Kansas City Chiefs
09/16	W	34-21	at Carolina Panthers
09/23	L	24-30	Indianapolis Colts
09/30	L	16-26	at Atlanta Falcons
10/07	W	22-19	Miami Dolphins
10/14	L	17-37	at Jacksonville Jaguars
10/21	L	36-38	Tennessee Titans
10/28	L	10-35	at San Diego Chargers
11/04	W	24-17	at Oakland Raiders
11/18	W	23-10	New Orleans Saints
11/25	L	17-27	at Cleveland Browns
12/02	L	20-28	at Tennessee Titans
12/09	W	28-14	Tampa Bay Buccaneers
12/13	W	31-13	Denver Broncos
12/23	L	15-38	at Indianapolis Colts
12/30	W	42-28	Jacksonville Jaguars

WON 8, LOST 8

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Dayne	194	773	4.0	39	6
Walker	58	264	4.6	41	1
Green	70	260	3.7	18	2
Echemandu	20	85	4.3	20	0
Schaub	17	52	3.1	12	0
Rosenfels	21	51	2.4	19	1
Gado	18	46	2.6	7	1
Walter	5	30	6.0	13	0
Cook	8	24	3.0	9	0
Leach	2	2	1.0	1t	1
Turk	1	0	0.0	0	0
Jones	3	-1	-0.3	4	0
TEXANS	**417**	**1586**	**3.8**	**41**	**12**
OPPONENTS	417	1825	4.4	76	15

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Walter	65	800	12.3	46	4
Daniels	63	768	12.2	29	3
Johnson	60	851	14.2	77t	8
Davis	33	583	17.7	53t	3
Leach	25	108	4.3	15	2
Dayne	17	112	6.6	17	0
Jones	15	149	9.9	26	0
Green	14	123	8.8	53	0
Walker	13	81	6.2	9	0
Anderson	12	131	10.9	24	1
Cook	8	40	5.0	9	0
Gado	8	59	7.4	20	0
Putzier	6	39	6.5	11	1
Dreessen	4	55	13.8	28t	2
Echemandu	2	11	5.5	7	0
Mathis	1	15	15.0	15	0
TEXANS	**46**	**3925**	**11.3**	**77t**	**24**
OPPONENTS	361	3878	10.7	74t	25

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Schaub	289	192	2241	9	9
Rosenfels	240	154	1684	15	12
TEXANS	**529**	**346**	**3925**	**24**	**21**
OPPONENTS	546	361	3878	25	11

SACKS TEXANS 31, OPPONENTS 22

Williams 14, Okoye 5.5, Kalu 3, Anderson 2, Maddox 2, Ryans 2, Cochran 1, Greenwood 1, Hutchins 0.5

HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL

Consistency is a big concern with Okam, and the Texans' defensive-line coaches will be doing what they can to help him reach his potential. **GRADE: B-**

Linebackers This unit centers around Ryans, who is coming off his first Pro Bowl invitation. He studies film for hours each week and reads offenses well on game day. Ryans has pass-rush ability but is mostly used to sitting back and stopping running backs from reaching the secondary.

Weakside linebacker Morlon Greenwood has fit well into the Texans' system. He lacks exceptional speed but gets to the ball and is able to make plays.

Zac Diles will try to earn the starting job at strongside linebacker left vacant by the free-agent departures of Danny Clark and Charlie Anderson. Diles is undersized but quick and athletic. He won't add much of a pass-rush threat, which is why the Texans signed Chaun Thompson to help. In passing situations, Thompson can put his hand down and rush the quarterback.

Kevin Bentley was added because of his ability to play all three positions on the line. He will push Diles on the strong side and adds needed athleticism. **GRADE: C+**

Secondary The secondary took a big hit with injuries last season. This year, without Robinson, who will be rehabbing a torn ACL and hamstring until at least mid-October, the Texans need players to step up and provide more big plays.

Fred Bennett must prove he can be a solid NFL starter for all 16 games. He is a big hitter who plays well against the run and has good size against receivers, but he must stay healthy and become a consistent threat.

Jacques Reeves will likely take over Robinson's job for the time being. He was solid for the Cowboys last season but did struggle on occasion in coverage. The Texans need him to be a consistent battler in pass defense.

Demarcus Faggins and Jamar Fletcher will compete for the nickel back job. If Faggins doesn't show improvement over last season, he may have a hard time sticking on the team, as Fletcher was consistent and strong at the position in 2007.

At safety, C.C. Brown and Will Demps will try to retain the starting jobs. However, former starter Glenn Earl has recovered from a Lisfranc foot fracture and will push to get his spot back. Brown improved greatly last season, showing a combination of physical play and skill in the open field. Demps is a big hitter across the middle who forces fumbles. **GRADE: C-**

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Texans return with much of their special-teams unit intact. Kicker Kris Brown is one of the few original Texans left on the roster. He's coming off of a solid season, hitting 25 of his 29 field-goal attempts. Matt Turk had a couple of bad games but put together one of his best overall seasons, landing 24 of 55 punts inside the 20-yard line. Houston also has one of the best long snappers in the game in Bryan Pittman, who has missed just one snap in his five-year career.

Re-signing Davis was critical for keeping Houston's return game strong, especially since the team let injury-plagued Jerome Mathis go in the offseason. Davis returned three kickoffs for touchdowns last season and was a threat to break a big play each time he fielded a kick. He's a smart veteran who makes good decisions with the ball.

Jones started the season strong on punt returns, but his progress stalled once he injured his shoulder. The Texans will look for him to develop into a solid punt-return man this season. His hands are good, but he must learn to make good decisions with the ball and become quicker at getting through holes. **GRADE: B+**

BOTTOM LINE

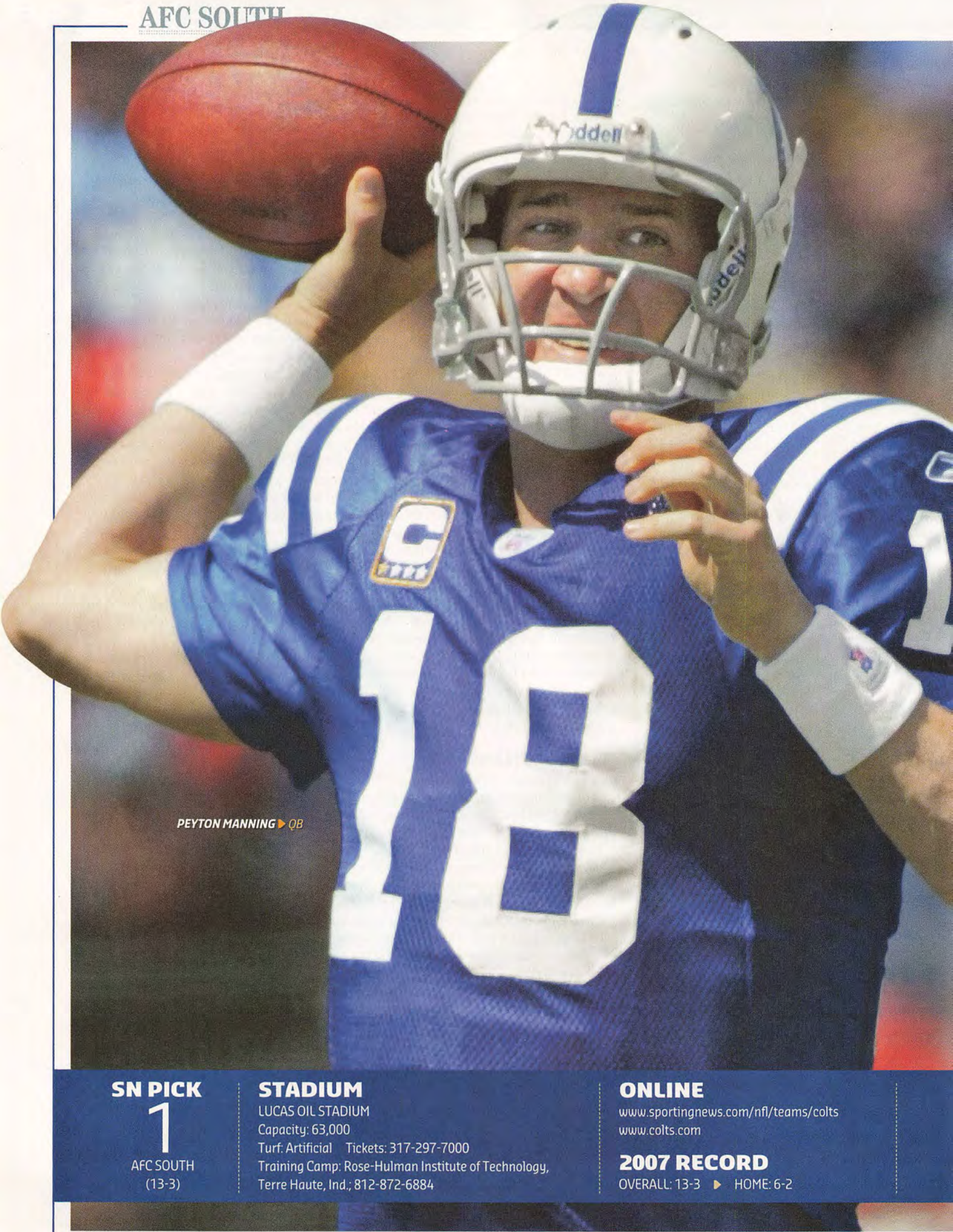
The Texans are getting closer to their ultimate goal of reaching the playoffs. Williams and Ryans lead an up-and-coming defense, and the offense should be vastly improved behind a better line and the return of Johnson and Green. Houston's biggest issue in the offseason was the inability to improve the defensive line with another pass-rushing end, but the team added talent to the positions that were the thinnest. The Texans appear on track for their first winning season, though a strong AFC South group will likely keep them out of the playoffs for at least one more year.

77

FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT

UP



PEYTON MANNING ▶ QB

SN PICK
1
AFC SOUTH
(13-3)

STADIUM
LUCAS OIL STADIUM
Capacity: 63,000
Turf: Artificial Tickets: 317-297-7000
Training Camp: Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, Terre Haute, Ind.; 812-872-6884

ONLINE
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www.colts.com

2007 RECORD
OVERALL: 13-3 ▶ HOME: 6-2

(L TO R): MARK CHRISTIAN / SN; SCOTT BOEHM / GETTY IMAGES; HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL

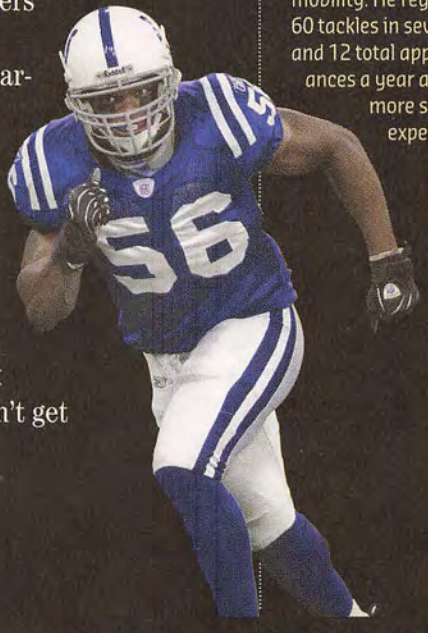
INDIANAPOLIS COLTS

Killer slate will slow Peyton's pace, but Indy will move fast enough to win South

By Mike Chappell, *Indianapolis Star*

When the Colts open the season with a Sunday night game against the Chicago Bears on Sept. 7, they'll be breaking in Lucas Oil Stadium, their new state-of-the-art digs in downtown Indianapolis. But the fresh venue won't disguise the fact that the Colts still haven't changed much from the dominant team they've been over much of the past decade. Twenty of 22 starters return to take aim at the organization's seventh straight playoff appearance (and ninth in the last 10 years) and sixth straight season with at least 12 victories.

"It's as good as it gets in terms of the excitement," owner Jim Irsay says. "When you look at the type of football team that's coming back, and Tony Dungy coming back and the new stadium—it just doesn't get any better than this."



BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

TYJUAN HAGLER ▶ LB

The revolving door at linebacker has deposited Hagler at opportunity's doorstep. He's entering his third season with the team and will open training camp as the strongside starter. Hagler lacks ideal size (6-0, 236 pounds), but is athletic and possesses good sideline-to-sideline mobility. He registered 60 tackles in seven starts and 12 total appearances a year ago, and more should be expected in '08.

FANTASY SPIN

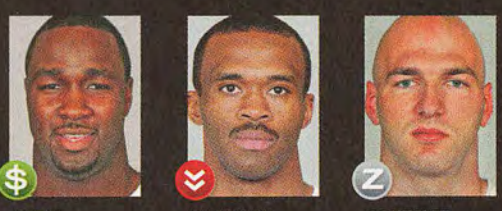
http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football

Reggie Wayne has taken the torch from Marvin Harrison in Indianapolis. Wayne led the NFL in receiving last season and has played in all 16 games for the past five years.

$ BUY »» Joseph Addai, RB

SELL »» Marvin Harrison, WR

Z SLEEPER »» Anthony Gonzalez, WR



ADDAI HARRISON GONZALEZ

OFFENSE

Tom Moore remains one of the NFL's best, yet unheralded, coordinators. He tailors his system to fit his players rather than trying to force them to adapt to a rigid scheme. It's an offense that takes risks when the situation warrants, but the talent level is so high that it seldom finds itself at a disadvantage. That allows Moore and quarterback Peyton Manning to dictate the style and tempo of a game. Manning and Moore have been together since 1998, which enables Manning to make his critical pre-snap adjustments while remaining in sync with his coordinator.

Quarterbacks Manning turned 32 in March and, entering his 11th season, has never missed a start. He represents the league's most experienced starting signal-caller (now that Brett Favre has retired) and remains the most indispensable player on the team.

There's no reason to anticipate a dip in Manning's game, which means the talent-laden Colts will once again field one of the league's most diverse and efficient offenses. He lays the groundwork for the regular season by spending countless hours with Moore and associate head coach Jim Caldwell, analyzing video of every play from the previous season.

It's hard to argue with the results: eight Pro Bowl appearances, eight playoff appearances and one Super Bowl title. Manning extended his own league record last season by passing for at least 4,000 yards an eighth time, and it might have been one of his best years. He remained ultra-productive even while injuries wreaked havoc on his supporting cast.

Jim Sorgi returns for a fifth season as Manning's backup. What he lacks in pure arm strength, he makes up for with a firm grasp of the offense. It's doubtful that Sorgi could replace Manning for a long stretch, but he has shown that he can run the offense effectively for a short period of time. **GRADE: A**

Running backs Joseph Addai put himself in elite company in 2007, joining Eric Dickerson, Marshall Faulk and Edgerrin James as the only players in club history to rush for at least 1,000 yards in each of his first two seasons with the team. His combination of running, catching and blocking skills make him an ideal fit in the offense.

But more is needed from the 2006 first-round draft pick. Although he's missed only one game in two years, shoulder, ankle and rib injuries sent him to the sideline for stretches of

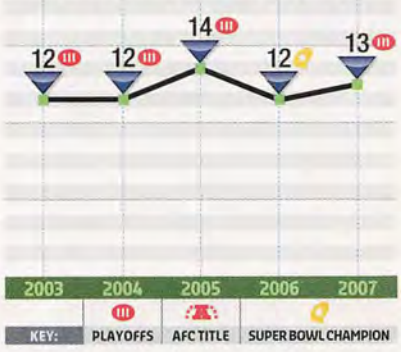
DRAFT REPORT GRADE ▸ B+

Once again, Bill Polian did an excellent job of finding players in almost every round who will start or contribute. In the second, he grabbed C **Mike Pollak**, the most technically sound of this year's offensive linemen, and he could challenge immediately for the starting spot at right guard. Pollak is a good athlete who will be effective in the Colts' blocking scheme. In the third round, the Colts took an athletic linebacker who fits their defense well. **Philip Wheeler** has great speed in pursuit and consistently makes plays in coverage. **Jacob Tamme** is a smart and efficient tight end with excellent hands and will fill in nicely for the departed Ben Utecht. **Marcus Howard**, a top-notch athlete, should help out in the pass rush as an undersized backup defensive end. **Tom Santi** will likely battle Tamme for the No. 2 spot at tight end throughout the season; the two are very similar. Center **Steven Justice** is big and strong with better-than-expected athleticism. He makes for an ideal backup to current C Jeff Saturday, whom Justice could replace in a few years. The Colts may have gotten the bargain of the draft in RB **Mike Hart**. He will be a highly productive No. 2 back who makes plays whenever he has the ball in his hands, though Hart lacks the size and explosiveness to become a feature back. Wide receiver **Pierre Garcon** and C **Jamey Richard** are two small-school players with potential. Both must develop their technique and are at least two- or three-year projects.

2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
2	28	Pollak, Mike	C	6-4	292	Arizona State
3	30	Wheeler, Philip	LB	6-2	230	Georgia Tech
4	28	Tamme, Jacob	TE	6-4	232	Kentucky
5	26	Howard, Marcus	LB	6-1	237	Georgia
6	30	Santi, Tom	TE	6-4	248	Virginia
6	35	Justice, Steve	C	6-4	285	Wake Forest
6	36	Hart, Mike	RB	5-9	195	Michigan
6	39	Garcon, Pierre	WR	6-0	210	Mount Union
7	29	Richard, Jamey	C	6-5	295	Buffalo

5-YEAR WINS TREND



NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	358.7	5
RUSHING	106.6	18
PASSING	252.1	6
SCORING	450	3
PUNT RETURNS	11.2	6
KICK RETURNS	21.8	22
RED ZONE TD %	56.5	10
TOTAL DEFENSE	279.7	3
AGAINST RUSH	106.9	15
AGAINST PASS	172.8	2
POINTS ALLOWED	262	1
INTERCEPTIONS	22	2t
SACKS	28	26t
TURNOVER DIFF.	+18	2

THE BOOK ON ... JOSEPH ADDAI *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"He's pretty good in all phases of the game. He's a confident guy. He's very explosive through the hole and can make the first guy miss. He's a decent blocker and has real good hands. Joe's just an all-around running back. He can do it all.

"Weaknesses? The game is a rough game, man, and he does get hurt sometimes. But that's about it. I'm not saying he's injury-prone, but he's had a few things. But Joe's a great, great player. He's pretty good in all phases."

TOP TO BOTTOM: BRAD SCHLOSS / ICON SMI; BOB LEVERONE / SN

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE *(an opponent breaks down the Colts)*

"They've done a helluva job. They've certainly beaten us their fair share of the time over the last couple of years at times when we really needed to have that win. They're so balanced and that's (a strength) they play to. It used to be all offensively, but when we lost to them in the playoffs two years ago they started to get those defensive players back and healthy, especially Bob Sanders. He is as good a safety as there is, maybe the best safety in all of football. And when you can bring the (pass) rush off the edge with (Dwight) Freeney ...

"I see they have 20 of 22 starters back. You can return 22 of 22 starters, but where's their depth? At some point injuries are going to be a factor and God forbid anything happens to Peyton Manning, which would be one extreme. Like any team, it's the depth that you have to worry about. It's the depth at a given position that keeps you up late at night."

games last season. This contributed to an erratic season. Addai rushed for averages of 100.6 yards per game and 4.7 yards per attempt in his first seven games. He faded over the last nine, however, including the playoff loss to the Chargers, when his yardage dipped to 45.7 a game and 3.3 a carry.

It will be interesting to monitor the competition behind Addai. The team signed Dominic Rhodes, who worked well in tandem with Addai in 2006 before hooking on with Oakland as a free agent. Rhodes should be considered the front-runner for the No. 2 role ahead of Kenton Keith, who showed flashes last season (rushing for 121 yards and two TDs against Tampa Bay) but was too erratic in the passing game. Sixth-round draft pick Mike Hart is another option. **GRADE: B-**

Receivers » All signs point to Marvin Harrison making a full recovery after missing 11 games in 2007 with an injury to his left knee. That was followed by offseason arthroscopic surgery to clean out his right knee. If these signs are correct, the position is loaded.

A 100-percent Harrison will be a motivated Harrison. The future Hall-of-Famer won't willingly relinquish his status as the group's No. 1 receiver to Reggie Wayne. And Wayne remains one of the league's most driven players at his position. He's coming off a second straight Pro Bowl appearance and has increased his reception total every year—topped by 104 last season, which produced a league-best 1,510 yards along with 10 touchdowns.

With Harrison and Wayne forcing defenses to focus on the outside, the middle of the field is generally vulnerable to either slot receiver Anthony Gonzalez, who contributed 37 receptions and three touchdowns as a rookie, or tight end Dallas Clark, who is coming off the best season of his five-year career (58 receptions, 616 yards, a team-high 11 TDs).

Depth proved invaluable last season when Harrison, Gonzalez and Clark missed a combined 15 games with injuries. If the reserves are called on again, first in line will be receivers Roy Hall, Devin Aromashodu and Courtney Roby and rookie tight ends Jacob Tamme and Tom Santi. One of the rookies must emerge for Manning to be able to work out of the two tight end set. **GRADE: A-**

Offensive line » Four of five starters and the primary backups return for one of the NFL's more efficient units. The only question is whether second-round draft pick Mike Pollak is able to assert himself and wrestle the vacant starting right-guard spot away from Charlie Johnson. Pollak was one of three athletic interior linemen the Colts selected in the draft, and the primary component in a movement to inject the unit with more youth and versatility. The team added Steve Justice and Jamey Richard, two more interchangeable parts, in the later rounds.

The rest of the starting line is seasoned: left tackle Tony Ugoh, left guard Ryan Lilja, three-time Pro Bowl center Jeff Saturday and right tackle Ryan Diem. Saturday continues to mastermind the operation, working in tandem with Manning to make the pre-snap adjustments. Michael Toudouze, Dan Federkeil and Corey Hilliard will likely compete for backup work at tackle while Justice and Richard are in line to vie for playing time at center and guard.

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		
QB	Peyton Manning	Jim Sorgi
TE	Jacob Tamme	Gijon Robinson
RB	Joseph Addai	Dominic Rhodes
WR	Reggie Wayne	Devin Aromashodu
WR	Marvin Harrison	Anthony Gonzalez
TE	Dallas Clark	Tom Santi
LT	Tony Ugoh	Dan Federkeil
LG	Ryan Lilja	Mike Elgin
C	Jeff Saturday	Steve Justice
RG	Mike Pollak	Charlie Johnson
RT	Ryan Diem	Michael Toudouze
DEFENSE		
LE	Robert Mathis	Marcus Howard
LT	Raheem Brock	Keyunta Dawson
RT	Edward Johnson	Quinn Pitcock
RE	Dwight Freeney	Josh Thomas
SLB	Tyjuan Hagler	Philip Wheeler
MLB	Gary Brackett	Clint Session
WLB	Freddy Keiaho	Victor Worsley
LC	Marlin Jackson	Tim Jennings
SS	Bob Sanders	Brannon Condren
FS	Antoine Bethea	Matt Giordano
RC	Kelvin Hayden	Dante Hughes
SPECIALISTS		
K	Adam Vinatieri	
P	Hunter Smith	
KR	T.J. Rushing	
PR	T.J. Rushing	
LS	Justin Snow	

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 Chicago — SEPT. 7 8:15 — SCORE

WEEK 2 @ Minnesota — SEPT. 14 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 3 Jacksonville — SEPT. 21 4:15 — SCORE

WEEK 4 *OPEN DATE*

WEEK 5 @ Houston — OCT. 5 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 6 Baltimore — OCT. 12 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 7 @ Green Bay — OCT. 19 4:15 — SCORE

WEEK 8 @ Tennessee — OCT. 27 8:30 — SCORE

WEEK 9 New England — NOV. 2 8:15 — SCORE

WEEK 10 @ Pittsburgh — NOV. 9 4:15 — SCORE

WEEK 11 Houston — NOV. 16 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 12 @ San Diego — NOV. 23 8:15 — SCORE

WEEK 13 @ Cleveland — NOV. 30 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 14 Cincinnati — DEC. 7 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 15 Detroit — DEC. 14 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 16 @ Jacksonville — DEC. 18 8:15 — SCORE

WEEK 17 Tennessee — DEC. 28 1:00 — SCORE

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

Injuries forced Ugoh and Diem to miss time last season and cut into the unit's normal effectiveness. The running game sputtered down the stretch, while the protection allowed Manning to be sacked 21 times, his most since 23 in 2002. **GRADE: B**

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/06	W	41-10	New Orleans Saints
09/16	W	22-20	at Tennessee Titans
09/23	W	30-24	at Houston Texans
09/30	W	38-20	Denver Broncos
10/07	W	33-14	Tampa Bay Buccaneers
10/22	W	29-7	at Jacksonville Jaguars
10/28	W	31-7	at Carolina Panthers
11/04	L	20-24	New England Patriots
11/11	L	21-23	at San Diego Chargers
11/18	W	13-10	Kansas City Chiefs
11/22	W	31-13	at Atlanta Falcons
12/02	W	28-25	Jacksonville Jaguars
12/09	W	44-20	at Baltimore Ravens
12/16	W	21-14	at Oakland Raiders
12/23	W	38-15	Houston Texans
12/30	L	10-16	Tennessee Titans

WON 13, LOST 3

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Addai	261	1072	4.1	23	12
Keith	121	533	4.4	22	3
Dawson	30	64	2.1	12	1
Clark	2	29	14.5	15	0
Lawton	5	13	2.6	4	0
Wayne	1	4	4.0	4	0
Sorgi	6	-4	-0.7	1	0
Manning	20	-5	-0.3	4	3
COLTS	446	1706	3.8	23	19
OPPONENTS	454	1711	3.8	32	10

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Wayne	104	1510	14.5	64	10
Clark	58	616	10.6	39	11
Addai	41	364	8.9	73t	3
Gonzalez	37	576	15.6	57t	3
Utecht	31	364	11.7	30	1
Harrison	20	247	12.4	42	1
Fletcher	18	143	7.9	21	0
Keith	13	77	5.9	14	1
Thorpe	12	70	5.8	12	1
Moorehead	8	65	8.1	16	0
Aromashodu	7	96	13.7	28	0
Lawton	4	29	7.3	11	1
Dawson	2	15	7.5	9	0
COLTS	355	4172	11.8	73t	32
OPPONENTS	325	2926	9.0	55	16

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Manning	515	337	4040	31	14
Sorgi	36	18	132	1	0
COLTS	551	355	4172	32	14
OPPONENTS	498	325	2926	16	22

SACKS — COLTS 28, OPPONENTS 23

Mathis 7, Freeney 3.5, Sanders 3.5, Brock 2.5, Pitcock 1.5, Charleston 1, Dawson 1, Hagler 1, Johnson 1, Klecko 1, Rice 1, Thomas 1, Brackett 0.5, Jackson 0.5, Keiaho 0.5, Reid 0.5

DEFENSE

Coordinator Ron Meeks and his staff will once again emphasize the need for speed and aggression. Most of Indy's defenders are undersized at their position by NFL standards, but they compensate by playing at a high level and tempo. The front four focus on attacking the quarterback and running back, while the back seven concentrate on keeping players in front of them and limiting over-the-top plays.

Defensive line The front four holds the key to Dungy's defense. Its task is to hold up against the run while penetrating the line and creating havoc in the opposing backfield. Few teams can match the pass-rush tandem of Dwight Freeney and Robert Mathis, who have combined for 89 sacks and 47 forced fumbles since 2003. Their ability to exert pressure from the outside creates one-on-one opportunities for a tackle rotation that includes Raheem Brock, Ed Johnson, Quinn Pitcock, Keyunta Dawson and Darrell Reid.

For position coach John Teerlinck to maximize his talent, though, a third pass rusher must emerge. The rush suffered greatly over the final half of last year when Freeney suffered a season-ending foot injury. He expects to be ready for the start of the regular season. Veteran end Josh Thomas is more effective in run situations, likely leaving the third pass-rush spot for rookie Marcus Howard. The team considers the 6-1, 237-pound player to be cut from the same mold as Mathis: cat-quick and relentless.

One of the strengths of the group is its versatility. Brock started 27 games at tackle the past two seasons after starting 54 at left end from 2002-05. And Dawson, a high-energy 6-3, 254-pounder, will be allowed to develop as a tackle even though he has seen playing time at end. **GRADE: B**

Linebackers The success of an ever-changing unit hinges on how well untested young players mesh with the holdovers. Gary Brackett returns for a sixth year, his fourth as the inside starter. No other player has more than two seasons of experience. Brackett's entire supporting cast has started a combined 19 games, and weakside starter Freddy Keiaho has accounted for 11.

The group has promise, though. Keiaho is a big hitter with a nose for the ball, while Tyjuan Hagler brings athleticism to the position. Clint Session is an instinctive player who made the most of his only start as a rookie, intercepting two passes at San Diego. Philip Wheeler, the team's third-round pick from Georgia Tech, needs to make an impact. He's the prototypical prospect for a Dungy defense—a tad undersized at 6-2 and 230 pounds, but active both against the run and in coverage. **GRADE: C**

Secondary How set is the defensive backfield? The Colts did not draft a cornerback or safety for the first time since 1977.

The starting unit is one of the best around. Bob Sanders became the highest-paid safety in the league in December, and then brought immediate dividends by being named NFL Defensive Player of the Year. Sanders is physical and relentless, and he plays with a mean streak. Free safety Antoine Bethea, meanwhile, made his first Pro Bowl appearance after joining the team as a sixth-round draft pick in 2006—a testament to his well-rounded and still-improving game.

REGGIE WAYNE ▸ WR

OFFSEASON MOVES

ADDITIONS:
P **Chad Stanley** *(FA/Texans)*, RB **Dominic Rhodes** *(FA/Raiders)*

SUBTRACTIONS:
LB **Brandon Archer** *(FA/Broncos)*, LB **Rob Morris** *(FA)*, DT **Anthony McFarland** *(FA)*, G **Jake Scott** *(FA/Titans)*, WR **Craphonso Thorpe** *(FA)*, LB **Rocky Boiman** *(FA/Eagles)*, DT **Dan Klecko** *(FA/Eagles)*

COLTS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1 Mike Curtis *(1965-75)*

Started his career outside, but the Colts moved him to middle linebacker to utilize his ball-hawking speed. Might have been a Hall-of-Famer had he played a bit longer, but still made four Pro Bowls.

2 Ted Hendricks *(1969-73)*

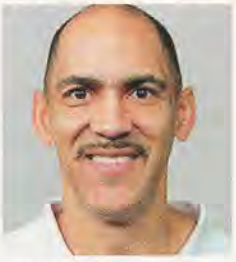
Played in Curtis' shadow before emerging as an elite player after his move to the Raiders. Played on the strong side and was tough on tight ends. Made three Pro Bowls in his five seasons with the Colts.

3 Don Shinnick *(1957-69)*

Big, strong 'backer who gambled often and came up with 37 career interceptions, including a league-leading seven in 1959.

BOB LEVERONE / SN

INSIDE THE HEADSET



TONY DUNGY

One of Tony Dungy's favorite sayings is "death by inches." He believes that teams that don't pay attention to the small details often find ways to beat themselves. He stresses doing things the right way on every play. Dungy is a conservative coach by nature, but has shown a willingness to gamble if the situation warrants. There's no question that having an efficient, explosive offense has increased his risk-taking.

Starters Marlin Jackson and Kelvin Hayden form a pair of big, physical corners who excel in coverage and run support.

The secondary's main objective is to limit breakout plays, and it hasn't disappointed. Last season the Colts allowed just 20 pass plays of at least 20 yards or more, good for the top mark in the league.

The backups are also tested. Safety Matt Giordano, arguably the fastest player on the team, has started five games and appeared in 39. The main depth at corner comes from Tim Jennings, a 2006 second-round pick, and Dante Hughes, a third-round pick in 2007. **GRADE: A-**

SPECIAL TEAMS

The bodies of work for placekicker Adam Vinatieri and punter Hunter Smith speak for themselves, but each needs to bounce back from a sub-par season. Vinatieri missed six of his 29 field-goal attempts (.793, his worst percentage since 2003), including a point-blank 29-yarder in the closing seconds at San Diego that sealed a 23-21 midseason loss. Few believe he's lost his touch, but the team can't afford to have him struggle again this season. The difficult schedule won't allow it. The Colts' 2008 opponents combined for a .594 win percentage last season.

Smith, meanwhile, averaged a 41.9 gross, his worst since 2002. His 34.2 net ranked 31st in the league. That might be a sign of age—he's entering his 10th season and has launched 524 punts—but it could just be an aberration. Smith has been one of the league's best situational punters with 122 attempts downed inside the 20 and just 30 touchbacks since 2002.

Dungy needs more from T.J. Rushing in the return game and much more from his coverage units. Despite featuring young, athletic linebackers and defensive backs on their punting and kicking teams, the Colts have failed miserably. They've allowed a staggering eight returns for touchdowns in the last two years, including the postseason. But even the unsightliness of the coverage hasn't hidden the seek-and-destroy talents of defensive tackle Darrell Reid. He deserved a Pro Bowl invitation last season. **GRADE: C-**

BOTTOM LINE

Anything less than another strong push for the Super Bowl will be a disappointment. Both sides of the ball are loaded with impact players; now it's up to coach Tony Dungy and his staff to keep everyone hungry and focused. The Colts face the second-toughest schedule in the league and play in the loaded AFC South. Nothing will come easily, but a 13-win season, another division title and another season with championship possibilities should be expected.

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FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT

STEADY

HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL

ROSTER

#	QUARTERBACKS	>>	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
9	Betts, Josh	QB	6-2	217	08/25/1982	0	Miami (OH)
18	Manning, Peyton	QB	6-5	230	03/24/1976	10	Tennessee
12	Sorgi, Jim	QB	6-5	196	12/03/1980	4	Wisconsin

#	OFFENSIVE LINE	>>	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
71	Diem, Ryan	T	6-6	320	07/01/1979	7	Northern Illinois
62	Elgin, Mike	G	6-3	282	10/15/1983	0	Iowa
66	Esera, Tala	T	6-3	310	06/15/1984	0	Hawaii
76	Federkeil, Daniel	T	6-6	290	11/09/1983	2	Calgary
57	Gandy, Dylan	G	6-3	302	03/08/1982	3	Texas Tech
72	Hilliard, Corey	T	6-6	305	04/26/1985	1	Oklahoma State
74	Johnson, Charlie	T	6-4	305	05/02/1984	2	Oklahoma State
65	Lilja, Ryan	G	6-2	290	10/15/1981	4	Kansas State
60	Ross, Patrick	G	6-3	300	03/16/1983	0	Boston College
63	Saturday, Jeff	C	6-2	295	06/08/1975	9	North Carolina
75	Toudouze, Michael	T	6-6	303	04/27/1983	1	TCU
67	Ugoh, Tony	T	6-5	301	11/17/1983	1	Arkansas

#	RUNNING BACKS	>>	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
29	Addai, Joseph	RB	5-11	214	05/03/1983	2	LSU
30	Dawson, Clifton	RB	5-10	212	10/08/1983	1	Harvard
27	Hairston, Justise	RB	6-1	210	06/27/1983	0	Central Connecticut St.
36	Keith, Kenton	RB	5-11	210	07/14/1980	1	New Mexico State
45	Lawton, Luke	RB	6-0	240	08/26/1980	2	McNeese State
	Rhodes, Dominic	RB	5-9	203	01/17/1979	8	Midwestern State

#	RECEIVERS	>>	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
80	Aromashodu, Devin	WR	6-2	200	05/23/1984	1	Auburn
44	Clark, Dallas	TE	6-3	252	06/12/1979	5	Iowa
81	Fletcher, Bryan	TE	6-5	230	03/23/1979	3	UCLA
11	Gonzalez, Anthony	WR	6-0	193	09/18/1984	1	Ohio State
83	Hall, Roy	WR	6-3	240	12/08/1983	1	Ohio State
88	Harrison, Marvin	WR	6-0	185	08/25/1972	12	Syracuse
11	Jones, Onrea	WR	6-2	203	12/22/1983	0	Hampton
85	Moorehead, Aaron	WR	6-3	200	11/05/1980	6	Illinois
47	Robinson, Gijon	TE	6-1	255	10/12/1984	0	Missouri Western St.
10	Roby, Courtney	WR	6-0	189	01/10/1983	2	Indiana
42	Seidman, Mike	TE	6-4	261	02/11/1981	6	UCLA
48	Snow, Justin	TE	6-3	240	12/21/1976	8	Baylor
87	Wayne, Reggie	WR	6-0	198	11/17/1978	7	Miami (FL)

#	DEFENSIVE LINE	>>	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
69	Bradley, Joe	DT	6-4	265	12/11/1982	0	Louisiana-Lafayette
79	Brock, Raheem	DT	6-4	274	06/10/1978	6	Temple
90	Charleston, Jeff	DE	6-4	265	01/19/1983	1	Idaho State
96	Dawson, Keyunta	DE	6-3	254	09/13/1985	1	Texas Tech
93	Freeney, Dwight	DE	6-1	268	02/19/1980	6	Syracuse
64	Ishola, Ben	DE	6-3	248	06/08/1980	1	Indiana
99	Johnson, Ed	DT	6-2	296	12/18/1983	1	Penn State
98	Mathis, Robert	DE	6-2	245	02/26/1981	5	Alabama A&M
97	Pitcock, Quinn	DT	6-2	299	09/14/1983	1	Ohio State
95	Reid, Darrell	DT	6-2	288	06/20/1982	3	Minnesota
91	Thomas, Josh	DE	6-5	271	06/26/1981	4	Syracuse

#	DEFENSIVE BACKS	>>	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
41	Bethea, Antoine	S	5-11	203	07/07/1984	2	Howard
33	Bullitt, Melvin	S	6-1	201	11/13/1984	1	Texas A&M
25	Coe, Michael	CB	6-0	190	12/17/1983	1	Alabama State
42	Condren, Brannon	S	6-1	205	08/19/1983	1	Troy
43	Giordano, Matt	S	5-11	200	10/16/1982	3	California
26	Hayden, Kelvin	CB	6-0	195	07/23/1983	3	Illinois
20	Hughes, Dante	CB	5-10	188	08/21/1985	1	California
28	Jackson, Marlin	CB	6-0	196	06/30/1983	3	Michigan
23	Jennings, Tim	CB	5-8	185	12/24/1983	2	Georgia
31	Ratliff, Keiwan	CB	5-11	188	04/19/1981	4	Florida
34	Rushing, T.J.	CB	5-9	186	06/08/1983	2	Stanford
21	Sanders, Bob	S	5-8	206	02/24/1981	4	Iowa
37	Smith, Antonio	CB	5-9	192	06/12/1984	1	Ohio State

#	LINEBACKERS	>>	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
58	Brackett, Gary	LB	5-11	235	05/23/1980	5	Rutgers
52	Guzman, Ramon	LB	6-2	232	09/29/1982	1	Buffalo
56	Hagler, Tyjuan	LB	6-0	236	12/03/1981	2	Cincinnati
54	Keiaho, Freddy	LB	5-11	226	12/18/1982	2	San Diego State
55	Session, Clint	LB	6-0	235	09/09/1984	1	Pittsburgh
59	Shotwell, Kyle	LB	6-1	235	03/29/1984	0	Cal Poly
51	Worsley, Victor	LB	6-1	235	04/24/1984	1	North Carolina

#	KICKERS	>>	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
8	Andrus, Shane	K	5-10	190	10/02/1980	1	Murray State
17	Smith, Hunter	P	6-2	209	08/09/1977	9	Notre Dame
7	Stanley, Chad	P	6-3	205	01/29/1976	8	Stephen F. Austin
4	Vinatieri, Adam	K	6-0	202	12/28/1972	12	South Dakota State

▶ **TONY DUNGY,** *Head coach*

Ron Meeks, def. coord.; **Tom Moore**, off. coord.; **Jim Caldwell**, associate head coach; **Alan Williams**, def. backs; **Clyde Christensen**, wide receivers; **Gene Huey**, running backs; **Howard Mudd**, off. line; **Mike Murphy**, linebackers; **Russ Purnell**, special teams; **John Teerlinck**, defensive line; **Ricky Thomas**, tight end

JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE

(an opponent breaks down the Jaguars)

"They're a very good football team. They play an attrition game. They run two very good running backs at you and wear you down. They have big, strong people, particularly up front, defensively. They have good, physical corners. Really, their body of work, what they've done, speaks to what they are. They're brutally consistent. They're a good football team; very physical. Fred Taylor is an awesome football player, and he's complemented by another good young player in (Maurice) Jones-Drew. They stop the run with big people up front. They're good from top to bottom and they play a physical brand of football. ...

"People say they can't rush the passer, but they've been able to get some timely sacks. Defensively, if there's a weakness, that's it. They just don't have that guy up front that people have to account for every down. On offense, nothing about their receivers really scares you. But when you run as well as they do, that's not that big of a concern. They've got some big guys at receiver who aren't the fastest, but they are pretty physical. (Dennis) Northcutt is the speed guy, but he seems to shy away from contact."

With newfound stability at quarterback, Jags primed for a fun postseason run

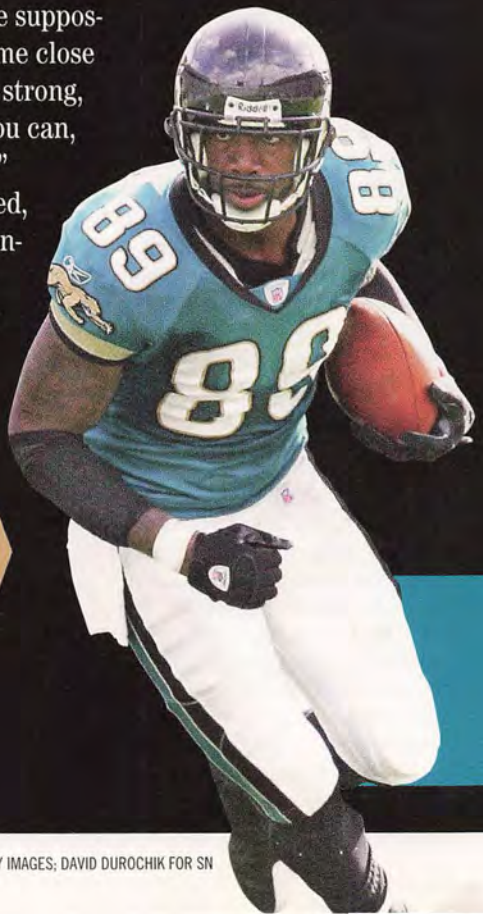
By Michael C. Wright, *Florida Times-Union*

Jack Del Rio keeps denying it, but based on the Jaguars' offseason and draft-day actions, Operation Super Bowl 2008 is in full effect.

Jacksonville was aggressive in addressing the offense through free agency, and the Jags then pulled off a couple of draft-day trades to land a pair of coveted edge rushers. The perception now is that the Jags are ready to compete for a title.

"I don't subscribe to that," Del Rio says. "You can look and there are a host of teams that were supposedly stacked to win it all and didn't ever come close (last season). I believe you build your team strong, you do all you can to be as competitive as you can, coach them up and go let it rip on Sundays."

With its quarterback situation finally settled, Jacksonville owns the key ingredient to attaining consistent success. The addition of free-agent wideout Jerry Porter and the trade for receiver Troy Williamson give the club the element of speed it has been missing to complement a bruising ground attack.

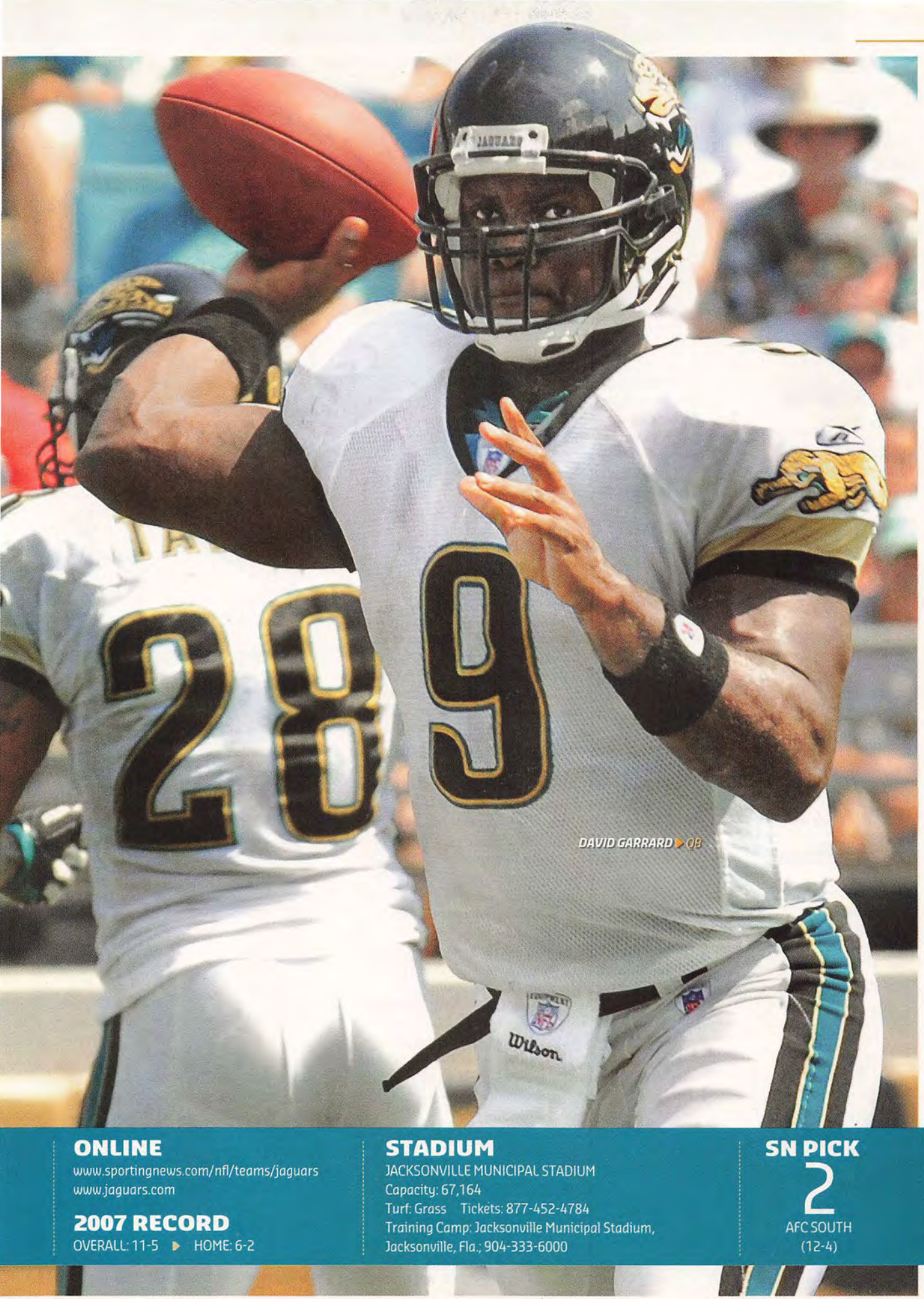


BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

MARCEDES LEWIS ▶ TE

The former first-round pick should come into his own during his third season. Preparing to take over as the club's primary starter at tight end, Lewis concentrated mostly on solidifying his blocking skills last year. This season, he expects his role as a receiver to grow in the club's tight-end-friendly passing offense.

(L TO R): SAM GREENWOOD / GETTY IMAGES; DAVID DUROCHIK FOR SN



ONLINE

www.sportingnews.com/nfl/teams/jaguars
www.jaguars.com

2007 RECORD

OVERALL: 11-5 ▶ HOME: 6-2

STADIUM

JACKSONVILLE MUNICIPAL STADIUM
Capacity: 67,164
Turf: Grass Tickets: 877-452-4784
Training Camp: Jacksonville Municipal Stadium, Jacksonville, Fla.; 904-333-6000

SN PICK

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AFC SOUTH
(12-4)

SCHEDULE

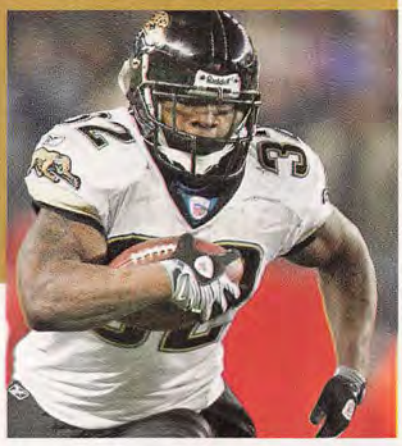
WEEK 1 @ Tennessee	SEPT. 7	1:00	W / L
WEEK 2 Buffalo	SEPT. 14	1:00	W / L
WEEK 3 @ Indianapolis	SEPT. 21	4:15	W / L
WEEK 4 Houston	SEPT. 28	1:00	W / L
WEEK 5 Pittsburgh	OCT. 5	8:15	W / L
WEEK 6 @ Denver	OCT. 12	4:05	W / L
WEEK 7 *OPEN DATE*			
WEEK 8 Cleveland	OCT. 26	4:05	W / L
WEEK 9 @ Cincinnati	NOV. 2	1:00	W / L
WEEK 10 @ Detroit	NOV. 9	1:00	W / L
WEEK 11 Tennessee	NOV. 16	1:00	W / L
WEEK 12 Minnesota	NOV. 23	1:00	W / L
WEEK 13 @ Houston	DEC. 1	8:30	W / L
WEEK 14 @ Chicago	DEC. 7	1:00	W / L
WEEK 15 Green Bay	DEC. 14	1:00	W / L
WEEK 16 Indianapolis	DEC. 18	8:15	W / L
WEEK 17 @ Baltimore	DEC. 28	1:00	W / L

SCORE

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

THE BOOK ON ... MAURICE JONES-DREW *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"The problem with stopping (Jones-Drew) is you can't see him coming through the hole until the very last second. When you finally do see him, he puts you in a hard spot. You've got two choices, and either one can make you look like a fool. One, you can break down, get your body under control and try to take him down that way. But if you do that, he's such a load that he can get under your pads, run you over and make you look real bad. Believe me, you don't want a guy like that running you over. The second thing you do is just try to fly in there and take the kill shot. But if you do that, he's got the speed and agility to make you miss. That's embarrassing, too. He's tough, man. The best thing you can do is read your keys and try to get to where he's going before he can get a head of steam going and before he gets his shoulders turned to the line."



ALBERT DICKSON / SN

Combine that with the moves made on defense (Jacksonville acquired cornerback Drayton Florence and drafted defensive ends Derrick Harvey and Quentin Groves), and it appears the Jags have positioned themselves to give Indianapolis a legitimate battle for the AFC South title, in addition to making a deep run in the playoffs.

OFFENSE

Going into Year 2 with offensive coordinator Dirk Koetter, expect the Jaguars to tweak their play-action-based passing attack to accommodate new personnel. The Jags employed more vertical routes in the passing game last year, but expect even more following a drastic upgrade in the speed of the receiver corps. Because of quarterback David Garrard's mobility and the strength of the rushing attack, the Jags are able to employ lots of rollouts and bootleg action. Hoping to exploit one-on-one matchups, they will continue to do that, so look for Koetter to also try and incorporate a greater role for tight ends in the passing attack.

Quarterbacks Fresh off signing a long-term extension, Garrard heads into his second season as the unquestioned starter, which is huge for Jacksonville. For a long time, the unsettled nature of the position was a major reason for the team's offensive inconsistency. It wouldn't be a surprise if Garrard's amazing climb continues with the reduction in stress that comes with entering the season as the undisputed No. 1 starter.

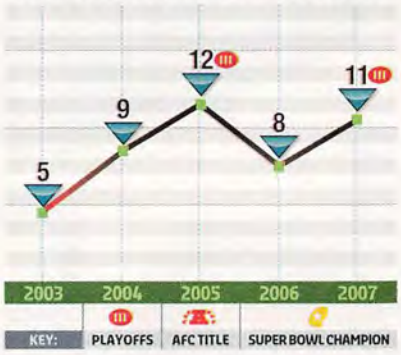
In hopes of helping along Garrard's development and as an insurance policy against the type of injuries that kept him out of three games last season, Jacksonville has brought in a couple of spare quarterbacks over the past two offseasons. Cleo Lemon, a former starter at Miami, will be the primary backup, followed by seventh-year pro Todd Bouman.

The Jaguars also signed rookie free agent Paul Smith, who passed for 42 touchdowns as a senior at Tulsa. **GRADE: B+**

Running backs Arguably the best duo in the league, Fred Taylor and Maurice Jones-Drew are coming off back-to-back seasons in which they helped the club combine for the two highest rushing totals in franchise history (2,541 yards in 2006 and 2,391 yards in '07). Despite being 32, Taylor has stepped up his training regimen in recent years and shows no signs of slowing down. One of the NFL's top cutback runners, he still possesses home-run speed and deceptive power. Jones-Drew adds blazing quickness and a battering-ram style, in addition to versatility as a receiver out of the backfield. Providing the lead blocks at the point of attack is fullback Greg Jones, who is coming off a stellar season in which he was named a Pro Bowl alternate.

Taylor says he is "on a mission" to surpass Jim Brown on the NFL's all-time rushing list. Needing close to

5-YEAR WINS TREND



NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	357.4	7
RUSHING	149.4	2
PASSING	208.0	17
SCORING	411	6
PUNT RETURNS	10.1	8
KICK RETURNS	22.7	16
RED ZONE TD %	56.9	9
TOTAL DEFENSE	313.8	12
AGAINST RUSH	100.3	11
AGAINST PASS	213.5	15
POINTS ALLOWED	304	10
INTERCEPTIONS	20	4t
SACKS	37	9t
TURNOVER DIFF.	+9	6t

1,600 yards to accomplish that feat, he adds that he'll likely retire within the next two years, which would open the door for Jones-Drew to become a full-time starter. The Jaguars will look to increase Jones-Drew's workload this season, so expect to see some formations that have both runners in the backfield at the same time.

GRADE: A-

Receivers » Jacksonville's ground game allows for several one-on-one matchups on the outside. But the club needed a receiver who can win the majority of those situations. That's why the Jags sought out Porter and Williamson.

In Porter and Dennis Northcutt, who will likely move inside to his more natural slot position, the Jags have a pair of veteran wideouts who can stretch defenses. The club also returns former first-round picks Reggie Williams and Matt Jones. Williams appears to finally be turning the corner in making the transition to the NFL and is coming off a breakout season. However, Jones continues to struggle and, because of the glut of talent at the position, may have a hard time sticking around.

At tight end, Marcedes Lewis, George Wrighster and Greg Estandia form a solid trio. All three excel as receivers, while Lewis and Wrighster are the best blockers.

GRADE: C+

Offensive line » The Jaguars released right guard Chris Naeole in the offseason. His spot appears to be the only question mark on the line. The team will have an open competition for the position among veterans Maurice Williams and Dennis Norman and rising second-year player Uche Nwaneri.

Although Williams started 10 games in Naeole's place last season and Norman is entering his eighth season, Nwaneri will likely be given the first shot to earn the spot. The club likes his athleticism and mean streak.

On the other side, left guard Vince Manuwai has quietly become one of the team's most consistent linemen, excelling as a run blocker. Center Brad Meester returns for his ninth season. After breaking a bone in his right ankle during training camp last year, Meester returned and showed no lingering effects from the injury.

After a few rocky preseason showings, right tackle Tony Pashos enjoyed a solid 2007 campaign. The club's most expensive free-agent acquisition last season, Pashos firmed up the right side of the pocket, providing an instant upgrade over Williams, who manned the position the previous year. Left tackle Khalif Barnes is probably the most athletic of all the club's linemen. Off-the-field problems dogged him at times last season, but Barnes appears to have rebounded.

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		
QB	David Garrard	Cleo Lemon
FB	Greg Jones	Montell Owens
RB	Fred Taylor	Maurice Jones-Drew
WR	Dennis Northcutt	Reggie Williams
WR	Jerry Porter	Troy Williamson
TE	Marcedes Lewis	George Wrighster
LT	Khalif Barnes	Richard Collier
LG	Vince Manuwai	Maurice Williams
C	Brad Meester	Dennis Norman
RG	Uche Nwaneri	Maurice Williams
RT	Tony Pashos	Richard Collier
DEFENSE		
LE	Paul Spicer	Quentin Groves
DT	Rob Meier	Tony McDaniel
DT	John Henderson	Derek Landri
RE	Derrick Harvey	Reggie Hayward
SLB	Daryl Smith	Brent Hawkins
MLB	Mike Peterson	Justin Durant
WLB	Clint Ingram	Brian Iwuh
LCB	Rashean Mathis	Scott Starks
SS	Gerald Sensabaugh	Jamaal Fudge
FS	Brian Williams	Reggie Nelson
RCB	Drayton Florence	Reggie Nelson
SPECIALISTS		
K	Josh Scobee	
P	Adam Podlesh	
KR	Maurice Jones-Drew	
PR	Dennis Northcutt	
LS	Joe Zelenka	

JAGUARS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1 Kevin Hardy *(1996-2001)*

Helped lead the Jags to four straight playoff appearances in his six years with the team. One of the best around in 1999, when he had 10.5 sacks and was a first-team All-Pro.

2 Mike Peterson *(2003-present)*

In his three healthy seasons after coming over from the Colts (2003-05), he made 535 tackles, 12 sacks and six interceptions.

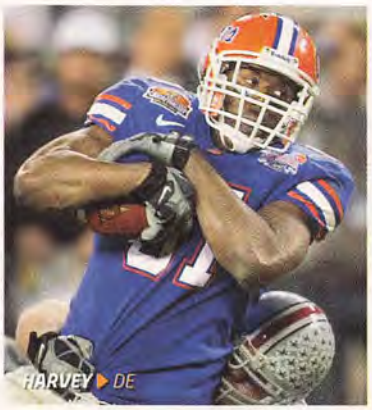
3 Daryl Smith *(2004-present)*

The Jags' linebacker of the future is an uncommon playmaker who already has a safety and 77-yard fumble return for a score to his name.

ALBERT DICKSON / SN

» DRAFT REPORT GRADE ▸ D

Jacksonville took a huge gamble by trading up to take DE **Derrick Harvey**, who was not a consistent player at Florida and will need to improve a great deal to live up to his draft status. A good athlete, Harvey can be effective rushing the QB when he does so with aggression and proper use of his hands. Too often, however, he gets upright and stopped by offensive tackles. Despite his athleticism and quick feet, he lacks the explosive burst to threaten the corner as a speed rusher. The Jaguars got a better football player a round later in DE **Quentin Groves**, who fell that far due to concerns about his off-field issues and maturity. Groves is an explosive athlete and consistently pressures the QB when he plays with leverage. He has the speed to pursue plays all over the field. **Thomas Williams** is a smart and very instinctive linebacker with the strength to take on blockers, but he is stiff and lacks all-around athleticism. He will likely end up becoming a good backup at all three spots and making a living on special teams. **Trae Williams** lacks the top-end speed and explosiveness of an elite cornerback, but he plays with the toughness, intensity and instincts to consistently break up passes, making him an ideal nickel back. **Chauncey Washington** has the talent to develop into a solid backup who can contribute with blocking and pass catching in addition to running the football.


HARVEY ▸ DE

» 2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
1	8	Harvey, Derrick	DE	6-4	262	Florida
2	21	Groves, Quentin	DE	6-3	254	Auburn
5	20	Williams, Thomas	LB	6-1	238	USC
5	24	Williams, Trae	CB	5-9	193	South Florida
7	6	Washington, Chauncey	RB	6-1	220	USC

ROSTER

#	QUARTERBACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
4	Bouman, Todd	QB	6-2	226	08/01/1972	5	St. Cloud State
9	Garrard, David	QB	6-2	240	02/14/1978	6	East Carolina
17	Lemon, Cleo	QB	6-2	215	08/16/1979	2	Arkansas State

#	OFFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
69	Barnes, Khalif	T	6-5	325	04/21/1982	3	Washington
75	Carnahan, Andrew	T	6-7	306	09/08/1983	0	Arizona State
76	Collier, Richard	T	6-7	358	10/23/1981	2	Valdosta State
72	Gibbons, Ryan	T	6-6	318	03/13/1983	0	Northeastern
67	Manuwai, Vince	G	6-2	325	07/12/1980	5	Hawaii
68	McMahon, Pete	T	6-8	330	10/15/1981	0	Iowa
63	Meester, Brad	C	6-3	300	03/23/1977	8	Northern Iowa
62	Norman, Dennis	C	6-5	323	01/26/1980	4	Princeton
77	Nwaneri, Uche	G	6-3	325	03/20/1984	1	Purdue
79	Pashos, Tony	T	6-6	320	08/03/1980	4	Illinois
78	Reyes, Tutan	G	6-3	310	10/28/1977	5	Mississippi
74	Williams, Maurice	T	6-5	315	01/26/1979	7	Michigan

#	RUNNING BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
33	Jones, Greg	RB	6-1	255	05/09/1981	3	Florida State
32	Jones-Drew, Maurice	RB	5-7	212	03/23/1985	2	UCLA
24	Owens, Montell	FB	5-10	219	05/04/1984	2	Maine
28	Taylor, Fred	RB	6-1	226	01/27/1976	10	Florida
35	Terry, D.D.	RB	6-1	190	09/09/1983	0	Sam Houston State

#	RECEIVERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
85	Angulo, Richard	TE	6-8	266	08/13/1980	3	Western New Mexico
15	Broussard, John	WR	6-1	176	12/18/1983	1	San Jose State
87	Davis, Charles	TE	6-5	254	03/13/1983	0	Purdue
83	Estandia, Greg	TE	6-8	240	11/18/1982	1	UNLV
18	Jones, Matt	WR	6-6	238	04/22/1983	3	Arkansas
89	Lewis, Marcedes	TE	6-6	265	05/19/1984	2	UCLA
86	Northcutt, Dennis	WR	5-11	171	12/22/1977	8	Arizona
84	Porter, Jerry	WR	6-2	220	07/14/1978	8	West Virginia
47	Smolko, Isaac	TE	6-5	260	02/28/1983	1	Penn State
81	Walker, Mike	WR	6-1	209	11/11/1984	0	UCF
11	Williams, Reggie	WR	6-4	214	05/17/1983	4	Washington
82	Williamson, Troy	WR	6-1	203	04/30/1983	3	South Carolina
77	Woods, D'Juan	WR	6-4	232	06/11/1984	0	Oklahoma State
87	Wrighster, George	TE	6-3	257	04/01/1981	5	Oregon
88	Zelenka, Joe	TE	6-3	265	03/09/1976	9	Wake Forest

#	DEFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
97	Hayward, Reggie	DE	6-5	285	03/14/1979	7	Iowa State
98	Henderson, John	DT	6-7	325	01/09/1979	6	Tennessee
70	Kennedy, Jimmy	DT	6-4	325	11/15/1979	5	Penn State
66	Landri, Derek	DT	6-3	288	09/21/1983	1	Notre Dame
96	McDaniel, Tony	DT	6-7	295	01/20/1985	2	Tennessee
92	Meier, Rob	DT	6-5	298	08/29/1977	8	Washington State
94	Mincey, Jeremy	DE	6-3	260	12/14/1983	1	Florida
91	Pettway, Kenneth	DE	6-4	238	11/13/1982	2	Grambling State
49	Smith, Brian	DE	6-4	239	09/16/1983	0	Missouri
95	Spicer, Paul	DE	6-4	296	08/18/1975	9	Saginaw Valley
90	Wyche, James	DE	6-5	271	04/19/1982	0	Syracuse

#	DEFENSIVE BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
21	Florence, Drayton	CB	6-0	195	12/19/1980	5	Tuskegee
23	Fudge, Jamaal	S	5-9	196	05/17/1983	2	Clemson
27	Mathis, Rashean	CB	6-1	200	08/27/1980	5	Bethune-Cookman
39	Moulton, Rashod	CB	5-11	190	11/06/1979	0	Fort Valley State
25	Nelson, Reggie	S	5-11	198	09/21/1983	1	Florida
42	Nkang, Chad	S	5-11	220	07/01/1985	1	Elon
20	Prioleau, Pierson	S	5-11	188	08/06/1977	10	Virginia Tech
43	Sensabaugh, Gerald	S	6-0	218	06/13/1983	3	North Carolina
31	Starks, Scott	CB	5-9	178	06/27/1983	3	Wisconsin
29	Williams, Brian	CB	5-11	198	07/02/1979	6	North Carolina State

#	LINEBACKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
56	Durant, Justin	LB	6-1	235	11/21/1985	1	Hampton
50	Gilbert, Tony	LB	6-0	244	10/16/1979	4	Georgia
57	Hawkins, Brent	LB	6-2	245	09/01/1983	2	Illinois State
51	Ingram, Clint	LB	6-2	245	03/21/1983	2	Oklahoma
59	Iwuh, Brian	LB	6-0	235	03/08/1984	2	Colorado
54	Peterson, Mike	LB	6-1	235	06/17/1976	9	Florida
52	Smith, Daryl	LB	6-2	244	03/14/1982	4	Georgia Tech

#	KICKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
3	Podlesh, Adam	P	5-11	202	08/11/1983	1	Maryland
10	Scobee, Josh	K	6-1	190	06/23/1982	4	Louisiana Tech

▶ **JACK DEL RIO,** *Head coach*

Gregg Williams, def. coord./asst. head coach/defense; **Dirk Koetter**, off. coord.; **Donnie Henderson**, def. backs; **Mike Tice**, asst. head coach/tight ends; **Joe DeCamillis**, special teams coord.; **Mark Duffner**, linebackers; **Andy Heck**, off. line; **Thom Kaumeyer**, asst. def. backs; **Nate Kaczor**, asst. special teams; **Ted Monachino**, def. line; **Todd Monken**, wide receivers; **Kennedy Pola**, running backs; **Robert Prince**, asst. wide receivers; **Mike Shula**, quarterbacks

Massive backup tackle Richard Collier (6-7, 358 pounds) remains a project but has the ability to push Barnes on the left side. **GRADE: B**

DEFENSE

Expect to see some subtle differences in this year's defense under new coordinator Gregg Williams. Known for exotic schemes that hinge on applying pressure up front, Williams will work with Del Rio to install somewhat of a new system. Del Rio expects to keep most of the terminology and core elements from his original defense, which has been one of the best in the NFL over the past five years. Del Rio's philosophies meshed with Williams' knowledge should provide a fresh system that will give opponents fits in making their adjustments.

Defensive line This is an area that could take on a drastically different look this year. The Jaguars traded defensive tackle Marcus Stroud to Buffalo and used their first two picks of the draft to add pass-rushing ends Harvey (Florida) and Groves (Auburn).

Because the club took that SEC duo with their top selections, there's an expectation that they will contribute heavily next season, which means Reggie Hayward's job could be in jeopardy. Hayward suffered a torn Achilles in '06 and has been slow to recover. His hefty contract could make him a salary-cap casualty if Harvey or Groves show significant development early on. The progress of the rookies may also have an effect on designated pass rushers Kenny Pettway and Jeremy Mincey.

Coming off one of his best seasons, left end Paul Spicer will be 33 when the season begins. But he's the team's top run-stuffer, and the Jaguars love his toughness.

Defensive tackles John Henderson and Rob Meier remain the starters inside. However, Tony McDaniel and Derek Landri will play key roles because the Jaguars like to rotate their tackles extensively to keep them fresh. **GRADE: B+**

Linebackers Arguably the club's strongest position, linebacker appears to be set with Clint Ingram on the weak side, Mike Peterson in the middle and Daryl Smith on the strong side. Peterson, 32, is entering the final season of his contract. He missed six games last season because of a broken hand but was still the club's third-leading tackler (70). Because of his high salary and season-ending injuries each of the last two years—along with the promising rookie campaign of backup Justin Durant—Peterson could be viewed as expendable by the front office.

OFFSEASON MOVES

ADDITIONS:

QB **Cleo Lemon** *(FA/Dolphins)*, WR **Troy Williamson** *(trade/Vikings)*, WR **Jerry Porter** *(FA/Raiders)*, DB **Drayton Florence** *(FA/Chargers)*, DT **Jimmy Kennedy** *(FA/Bears)*

SUBTRACTIONS:

RB **LaBrandon Toefield** *(FA/Panthers)*, DB **Aaron Glenn** *(FA/Saints)*, DE **Bobby McCray** *(FA/Saints)*, WR **Ernest Wilford** *(FA/Dolphins)*, LB **Shantee Orr** *(FA/Browns)*, DB **Terry Cousin** *(FA)*, NT **Grady Jackson** *(FA)*, DB **Sammy Knight** *(FA/Giants)*, QB **Quinn Gray** *(FA/Texans)*, G **Chris Naeole** *(FA)*, DB **Lamont Thompson** *(FA)*

INSIDE THE HEADSET

HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL

JACK DEL RIO

Del Rio likes to say he doesn't "coach scared." His actions on the field seem to back it up. The Jags led the NFL last season with 33 fourth-down attempts and 19 conversions, which was the most in the NFL since 1996. The former 11-year NFL linebacker employs a physical, smash-mouth approach.

FANTASY SPIN

http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football

GARRARD PORTER WILLIAMS

The Maurice Jones-Drew/Fred Taylor Express had less punch in 2007 (2,435 total yards, 15 TDs) than it did in '06 (2,765 total yards, 22 TDs). Expect the decline to continue.

$ BUY David Garrard, QB

SELL Jerry Porter, WR

Z SLEEPER Reggie Williams, WR

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/09	L	10-13	Tennessee Titans
09/16	W	13-7	Atlanta Falcons
09/23	W	23-14	at Denver Broncos
10/07	W	17-7	at Kansas City Chiefs
10/14	W	37-17	Houston Texans
10/22	L	7-29	Indianapolis Colts
10/28	W	24-23	at Tampa Bay Buccaneers
11/04	L	24-41	at New Orleans Saints
11/11	W	28-13	at Tennessee Titans
11/18	W	24-17	San Diego Chargers
11/25	W	36-14	Buffalo Bills
12/02	L	25-28	at Indianapolis Colts
12/09	W	37-6	Carolina Panthers
12/16	W	29-22	at Pittsburgh Steelers
12/23	W	49-11	Oakland Raiders
12/30	L	28-42	at Houston Texans

WON 11, LOST 5

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Taylor	223	1202	5.4	80t	5
Jones-Drew	167	768	4.6	57t	9
Garrard	49	185	3.8	19	1
Jones	42	119	2.8	11	2
Gray	19	57	3.0	15	0
Northcutt	6	27	4.5	8	0
Toefield	13	27	2.1	7	1
Williams	1	8	8.0	8	0
Podlesh	2	-2	-1.0	0	0
JAGUARS	**522**	**2391**	**4.6**	**80t**	**18**
OPPONENTS	390	1605	4.1	42	12

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Wilford	45	518	11.5	35	3
Northcutt	44	601	13.7	55t	4
Jones-Drew	40	407	10.2	43	0
Williams	38	629	16.6	80t	10
Lewis	37	391	10.6	25	2
Jones	24	317	13.2	48	4
Wrighster	17	123	7.2	36	1
Jones	11	99	9.0	27	2
Estandia	9	136	15.1	30	0
Taylor	9	58	6.4	18	0
Angulo	8	81	10.1	22	1
Broussard	4	126	31.5	56	1
Smolko	1	5	5.0	5	0
Toefield	1	4	4.0	4	0
JAGUARS	**288**	**3495**	**12.1**	**80t**	**28**
OPPONENTS	319	3660	11.5	58t	20

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Garrard	325	208	2509	18	3
Gray	144	80	986	10	5
JAGUARS	**69**	**288**	**3495**	**28**	**8**
OPPONENTS	543	319	3660	20	20

SACKS JAGUARS 37, OPPONENTS 31

Spicer 7.5, Meier 4, Hawkins 3.5, Hayward 3.5, McCray 3, Stroud 3, Henderson 2, Peterson 2, Smith 1.5, Cousin 1, Durant 1, Ingram 1, Mincey 1, Nelson 1, Pettway 1

HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL

Ingram missed time with an ankle injury last season, while Smith has become one of the club's most productive and versatile linebackers. Smith has filled in for Peterson at the middle spot for the past two seasons. Last season, with Smith in the middle, Durant moved to the strong side and played well.

The club recently moved former defensive end Brent Hawkins to linebacker, but it's unclear where he fits. As a rookie in '06, Hawkins struggled to make the transition from college end to NFL linebacker and was moved back to his original position. **GRADE: A-**

Secondary Lots of questions remain in the defensive backfield because of all the options the club is considering. With the addition of Florence, the Jaguars may move right cornerback Brian Williams to strong safety. That position is currently filled by Gerald Sensabaugh, who was penciled in as the starter going into last season but ended up on injured reserve after Week 2. Jacksonville has also toyed with the idea of switching Williams with free safety Reggie Nelson, who is coming off a strong rookie campaign.

The Jaguars recently hired Donnie Henderson as the defensive backs coach, and he'll likely play a key role in sorting everything out. Left cornerback is the only position that is set in stone, with former Pro Bowler Rashean Mathis manning the spot.

The club lost veteran nickel cornerback Terry Cousin and strong safety Sammy Knight in free agency. Fourth-year pro Scott Starks, considered the fastest player on the team, is expected to compete for the nickel job. The Jags drafted former University of South Florida corner Trae Williams in the fifth round.

Jacksonville also added veteran Pierson Prioleau, who spent the last three seasons in Washington, where he was known for taking an active role in tutoring young players. He'll likely be asked to do just that for the Jags' secondary, especially considering some of the intricacies of Williams' system. Prioleau played for Williams with the Redskins.

Contrary to the perception that the lack of a pass rush resulted in the club's loss to New England in the AFC divisional playoffs, the truth is that the secondary tackled horribly in that outing. Three-yard completions turned into eight- and 10-yard gains. That won't happen again, Del Rio vows. **GRADE: C+**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Injuries kept kicker Josh Scobee out of eight regular-season starts, but he hit 92.3 percent of his field goals on the year. Scobee has one of the strongest legs in the league and holds the franchise record for career touchbacks. Adam Podlesh handled the club's punting duties as a rookie and struggled at times. Podlesh ranked in the bottom half of the league (24th) with a 36.9-yard net average. That's an area that needs to improve for a team that strives on winning the field-position game. Known for his strong leg, Podlesh has potential but must become more consistent. Jones-Drew will be the club's top kickoff-return man this season after averaging 26.2 yards per return in 2007. He adds an explosive element to the return game and also does some fill-in duty on punts. Northcutt and Jones-Drew averaged 9.2 and 9.3 yards, respectively, on punt returns last season. Northcutt is projected to handle most of those duties this year. **GRADE: B**

BOTTOM LINE

Perhaps this is the year the Jaguars supplant Indianapolis as the AFC South champions. The pieces certainly are in place.

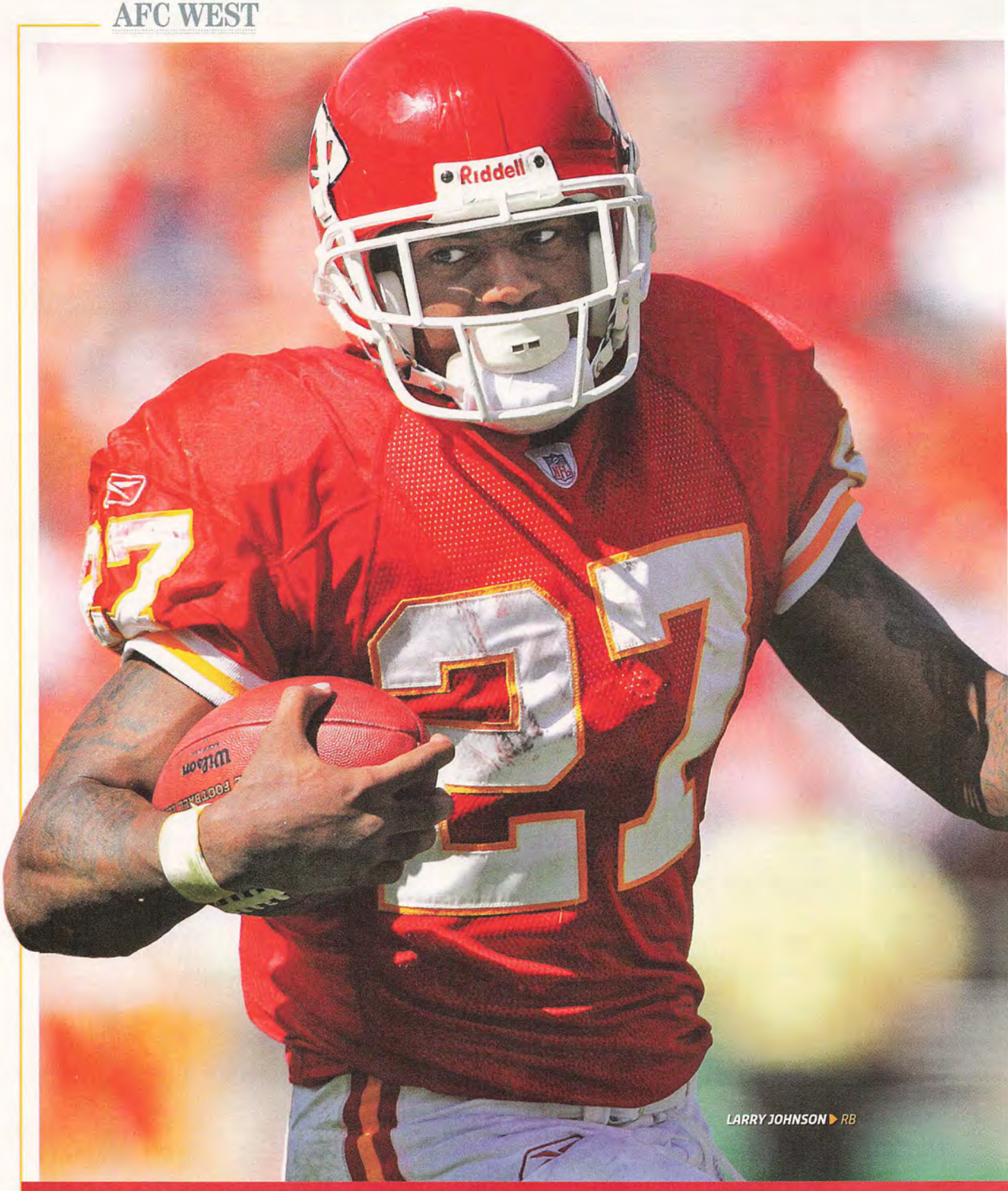
After a critical self-analysis in the offseason, Jacksonville targeted its pass rush, receivers and secondary as areas that needed improvement. The club then aggressively moved to make the necessary changes. Fielding its strongest roster in recent years, Jacksonville believes stability at quarterback is its most critical advantage moving forward. It certainly appears that way, judging from the team's success last season once it made Garrard the full-time starter. By providing Garrard weapons at receiver, along with the new defensive acquisitions, the Jaguars are in position to make a serious run at the Super Bowl. Their best scenario to do so is win the division and play host to a couple of playoff games. Jacksonville has the personnel and coaching staff to accomplish those goals.

90

FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT

UP



LARRY JOHNSON ▶ RB

SN PICK
3
AFC WEST
(5-11)

STADIUM
ARROWHEAD STADIUM
Capacity: 79,451
Turf: Grass Tickets: 816-920-9400
Training Camp: University of Wisconsin-River Falls, River Falls, Wis.; 715-425-4580

ONLINE
www.sportingnews.com/nfl/teams/chiefs
www.kcchiefs.com

2007 RECORD
OVERALL: 4-12 ▶ HOME: 2-6

(L TO R): MICHAEL MCNAMARA / SN; SCOTT SEWELL / ICON SMI; HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL

KANSAS CITY CHIEFS

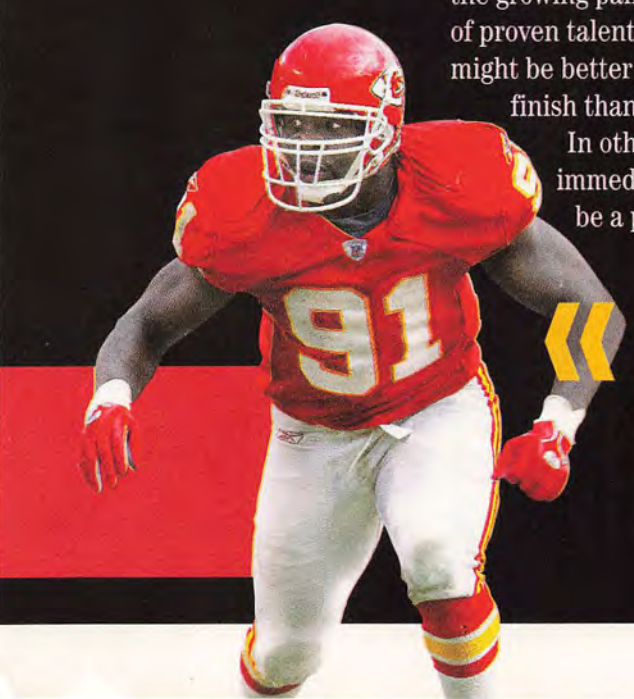
Chiefs expect draft to blow them into contention—come 2009

By Adam Teicher, *Kansas City Star*

Armed with ample salary-cap space and a list of free agents who could have helped them reload immediately, the Chiefs opted for a different path. They were largely bystanders during free agency, content to pass on the chance to spark a quick turnaround for a franchise that has quickly turned stale. The team even traded defensive end Jared Allen, the NFL's reigning sack leader and arguably its best player, for a package of draft choices.

And so the 2008 season was sacrificed in hopes of a better future, as the Chiefs went about rebuilding from the ground up in the NFL Draft. As many as three rookies could find a starting role by opening day, and several others figure to see the field. With the growing pains that the influx of youth in place of proven talent will undoubtedly bring, the season might be better judged by progress from start to finish than wins and losses.

In other words, there's little hope for the immediate future. At best, the goal should be a postseason berth in 2009.

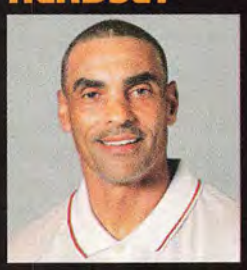


BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

TAMBA HALI ▶ DE

Hali didn't play as well last year as he did in 2006, when he was a rookie. But he played through nagging injuries, some of which should have kept him from the lineup. If Hali can stay healthy, he should be able to take the next step in his development.

INSIDE THE HEADSET



HERM EDWARDS

Edwards' conservative ways frequently limit the Chiefs. He is not only conservative in his decision-making, but the parameters he places on the offensive coordinator are often far too confining. As a result, the Chiefs have little margin for error.

OFFSEASON MOVES

ADDITIONS:

T **Anthony Alabi** *(FA/Dolphins)*, K **Billy Cundiff** *(FA/Saints)*, RB **Oliver Hoyte** *(FA/Cowboys)*, LB **Demorrio Williams** *(FA/Falcons)*, K **Nick Novak** *(FA/Redskins)*, WR **Devard Darling** *(FA/Ravens)*, RB **B.J. Sams** *(FA/Ravens)*, T **Wade Smith** *(FA/Jets)*

SUBTRACTIONS:

G **John Welbourn** *(FA)*, WR **Eddie Kennison** *(FA)*, DT **James Reed** *(FA)*, G **Chris Bober** *(FA)*, LB **Keyaron Fox** *(FA/Steelers)*, DE **Jimmy Wilkerson** *(FA/Bucs)*, FB **Kris Wilson** *(FA/Eagles)*, WR **Eddie Drummond** *(FA)*, T **Kyle Turley** *(FA)*, RB **Samie Parker** *(FA/Broncos)*, K **John Carney** *(FA)*, C **Casey Wiegmann** *(FA/Broncos)*, DB **Benny Sapp** *(FA/Vikings)*, FB **Boomer Grigsby** *(FA/Dolphins)*, OLB **Kendrell Bell** *(FA)*, CB **Ty Law** *(FA)*, TE **Jason Dunn** *(FA)*

OFFENSE

New coordinator Chan Gailey will build his system around the power running game and abilities of Larry Johnson. While the Chiefs will throw downfield at times, they will also make use of underneath passes that take advantage of Dwayne Bowe's ability to run after the catch. Gailey's system is an easy one to learn, which is an important asset for a unit in transition.

Quarterbacks Brodie Croyle has the ability to become a successful NFL starter, and the Chiefs have seen enough of it to give him another chance this season. But Croyle failed to put everything together in 2007, and this could be his last opportunity. The Chiefs won't hesitate to bring in a replacement next year if Croyle isn't more consistent. He can make all of the necessary passes and throws well on the run, but Croyle must improve his decision-making and ability to read defenses. The Chiefs must also give him some more help. Last year, the pass protection was lousy and the running game mostly unproductive.

Tyler Thigpen, a rookie last season, will get a chance to win the backup spot. Thigpen has a strong arm and the ability to make the necessary throws, but also has a lot of ground to cover because of his Division I-AA background. He will be competing for the No. 2 job with veteran Damon Huard, who has the experience but is much more limited physically. **GRADE: D**

Running backs Johnson suffered through a disappointing season, but it may have helped him in the long run. After serving as one of the busiest runners in NFL history over the previous year and a half, the broken foot he suffered in Week 9 spared him some additional wear and tear. Even before the injury, though, it had been a bad year. Johnson got a late start after missing all of training camp with a lengthy contract dispute, and the decrepit offensive line did a lousy job of making room for him to run. He will be in camp on time this year, and the line looks to be improved, so a return to his 2006 form is not out of the question.

Kolby Smith proved to be a capable backup during Johnson's absence. He provides a nice change of pace, as his quickness and elusiveness complement Johnson's power nicely. Rookie Jamaal Charles could also see some playing time as a big-play threat. The Chiefs won't use a fullback much, but they nabbed Oliver Hoyte off waivers from Dallas to play the position. His main function will be as a lead blocker for Johnson and Smith, a task Hoyte can adequately handle. **GRADE: A-**

Receivers Wide receiver is one position where the Chiefs appear to have left themselves particularly lacking in numbers as well as proven talent. Bowe led all rookies in receptions (70), receiving yards (995) and receiving touchdowns (5) last season. The Chiefs need him to have another big year, because he's their only reliable asset at the position.

Devard Darling, Jeff Webb and rookie Will Franklin will compete for playing time opposite Bowe. Darling is big and fast enough to stretch the field, but he produced little in four seasons with Baltimore. Webb, meanwhile, runs routes well and has reliable hands. Franklin will likely need some time to develop.

Tight end Tony Gonzalez should have another big season. At 32, Gonzalez doesn't run as well as he once did, but he otherwise shows no signs of slowing down. He's still athletic enough to make difficult catches when well covered. The Chiefs drafted Brad Cottam and Mike Merritt as blockers for the team's two-tight-end formation. **GRADE: C+**

Offensive line The Chiefs could have done more to rebuild an area that crumbled into disarray last season. The only high-profile addition is Branden Albert, a first-round draft pick who will be given the chance to start at one of the tackle positions. He will join guard Brian Waters, a three-time Pro Bowler, and Damion McIntosh, who will play the other tackle or guard spot.

5-YEAR WINS TREND

NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	276.8	31
RUSHING	78.0	32
PASSING	198.8	20
SCORING	226	31
PUNT RETURNS	7.6	25
KICK RETURNS	19.2	30
RED ZONE TD %	48.6	22
TOTAL DEFENSE	319.4	13
AGAINST RUSH	130.6	28
AGAINST PASS	188.9	5
POINTS ALLOWED	335	14
INTERCEPTIONS	14	23t
SACKS	37	9t
TURNOVER DIFF.	-11	28t

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

	OFFENSE	
QB	Brodie Croyle	Damon Huard
FB	Oliver Hoyte	Chris Manderino
RB	Larry Johnson	Kolby Smith
WR	Devard Darling	Jeff Webb
WR	Dwayne Bowe	Will Franklin
TE	Tony Gonzalez	Michael Allan
LT	Branden Albert	Adrian Jones
LG	Brian Waters	Anthony Alabi
C	Wade Smith	Rudy Niswanger
RG	Herb Taylor	Anthony Alabi
RT	Damion McIntosh	Herb Taylor

	DEFENSE	
LE	Alfonso Boone	Brian Johnston
LT	Glenn Dorsey	Turk McBride
RT	Ron Edwards	Tank Tyler
RE	Tamba Hali	Turk McBride
OLB	Derrick Johnson	Johnny Baldwin
MLB	Donnie Edwards	Napoleon Harris
OLB	Demorrio Williams	Pat Thomas
LCB	Patrick Surtain	Brandon Carr
SS	Bernard Pollard	Jon McGraw
FS	Jarrad Page	DaJuan Morgan
RCB	Brandon Flowers	Tyron Brackenridge

	SPECIALISTS	
K	Nick Novak	
P	Dustin Colquitt	
KR	B.J. Sams	
PR	B.J. Sams	
LS	Jean-Philippe Darche	

FANTASY SPIN

http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football

GONZALEZ CROYLE BOWE

Former fantasy stud Larry Johnson missed much of last season with a foot injury, but he should be fully healed and ready to return to fantasy prominence in 2008.

$ BUY Tony Gonzalez, TE

SELL Brodie Croyle, QB

Z SLEEPER Dwayne Bowe, WR

HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL

DRAFT REPORT GRADE ▸ A+

The Chiefs had one of the best efforts in the draft, in large part because they knew their targets and were both patient and aggressive when necessary. **Glenn Dorsey** brings the team a premier interior defensive tackle who will be a disruptive force from Day 1. He threatens to shoot gaps and blow up plays in the backfield on every down. Kansas City moved up for OL **Branden Albert**, who the team feels can start and provide a much-needed presence at left tackle. **Brandon Flowers'** aggressive and physical style had him the highest-rated cornerback on many boards. He should start as a rookie. Running back **Jamaal Charles** fell on draft boards due to fumbling and durability concerns, but his outstanding instincts combined with his strength and foot speed give him the talent to start. He will push Larry Johnson. **Brad Cottam** is a huge tight end with the speed and hands to be an impact receiver if he can avoid further injuries. **DaJuan Morgan** was too good to pass up at safety and could challenge for a starting job right away. Fast and athletic WR **William Franklin** needs lots of fundamentals work but was a good fourth-round addition. **Brandon Carr** has the physical tools to play cornerback in the NFL but needs to develop. **Barry Richardson** is a tall offensive tackle with long arms who must learn to block with better leverage and use his hands more effectively. **Kevin Robinson** should take over as the primary return man and could develop into the No. 3 receiver if he improves his routes. Defensive end **Brian Johnston** and TE **Mike Merritt** are better athletes than football players right now but good seventh-round values.

2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
1	5	Dorsey, Glenn	DT	6-2	303	LSU
1	15	Albert, Branden	G	6-7	315	Virginia
2	4	Flowers, Brandon	CB	5-10	200	Virginia Tech
3	10	Charles, Jamaal	RB	6-1	205	Texas
3	13	Cottam, Brad	TE	6-8	270	Tennessee
3	19	Morgan, DaJuan	S	6-1	200	North Carolina St.
4	6	Franklin, William	WR	6-2	205	Missouri
5	5	Carr, Brandon	CB	6-1	206	Grand Valley St.
6	4	Richardson, Barry	T	6-7	320	Clemson
6	16	Robinson, Kevin	WR	6-0	199	Utah State
7	3	Johnston, Brian	DE	6-5	280	Gardner-Webb
7	32	Merritt, Mike	TE	6-3	270	UCF

Kansas City must fill the remaining positions with the journeymen or young, unproven players already on the roster. The options include Wade Smith, Herb Taylor, Anthony Alabi, Adrian Jones, Rudy Niswanger and Will Svitek. Sorting through these possibilities—on top of determining the positions for Albert and McIntosh—will be one of the team's most important tasks once training camp begins.

While the Chiefs have nowhere to go but up from last year's unit, the acquisition of a proven free agent would have paid dividends. The additions of Smith, Alabi and Jones do provide some needed depth. Smith and Jones have spent time as starters with other clubs. **GRADE: D+**

DEFENSE

The Chiefs predominantly play cover 2, but as long as Gunther Cunningham runs the defense, they will blitz frequently in an effort to disrupt the quarterback. Cunningham will coach the linebackers this season, a sign that he wasn't happy with the production there in 2007. Overall, the Chiefs missed too many tackles and were occasionally out of position. The front seven consists mostly of veterans, but the secondary boasts plenty of youth.

Defensive line The Chiefs hurt themselves considerably when they traded Allen in the days before the draft. Allen is not just a premier pass rusher—he has improved tremendously against the run, gives maximum effort on every snap and rarely leaves the field.

The team took LSU tackle Glenn Dorsey with its first pick and will immediately plug him into the middle of the line. Tamba Hali moves from left end to the featured pass-rushing spot on the right side. Hali didn't

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE *(an opponent breaks down the Chiefs)*

"If the Chiefs get Larry Johnson and their running game going, they aren't a pleasant team to have to deal with. But when things aren't going well for him, he tends to pout, and that's a victory for our defense. ...

"Brodie Croyle didn't show me much when he got the chance to start at quarterback last season, so I don't know that sticking with him was a wise move. His decision-making was questionable, but that's typical for an inexperienced quarterback. In fairness to him, he had little help. Their offensive line was a mess, and we didn't have to worry much about their running game hurting us after Johnson's injury. ...

"When they were on defense, we felt that we would eventually make some plays if we were patient. Their cornerbacks were slow and their safeties could be fooled. That could change this season. They are younger at corner and the safeties have more experience."

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1	@ New England	SEPT. 7	1:00
WEEK 2	Oakland	SEPT. 14	1:00
WEEK 3	@ Atlanta	SEPT. 21	1:00
WEEK 4	Denver	SEPT. 28	1:00
WEEK 5	@ Carolina	OCT. 5	1:00
WEEK 6	OPEN DATE		
WEEK 7	Tennessee	OCT. 19	1:00
WEEK 8	@ New York Jets	OCT. 26	1:00
WEEK 9	Tampa Bay	NOV. 2	1:00
WEEK 10	@ San Diego	NOV. 9	4:15
WEEK 11	New Orleans	NOV. 16	1:00
WEEK 12	Buffalo	NOV. 23	1:00
WEEK 13	@ Oakland	NOV. 30	4:15
WEEK 14	@ Denver	DEC. 7	4:05
WEEK 15	San Diego	DEC. 14	1:00
WEEK 16	Miami	DEC. 21	1:00
WEEK 17	@ Cincinnati	DEC. 28	1:00

W — L — SCORE

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

play as well last year as he did during his rookie season. Nagging injuries hindered him, but he proved durable and was able to stay in the lineup. Hali should be able get back on track with better health. He needs to be sturdier against the run and finish better as a pass rusher.

Tackle Alfonso Boone moves to left end, with Dorsey sliding in at tackle next to Ron Edwards. The Chiefs lost Jimmy Wilkerson, their most reliable backup who played every position, to free agency. While Kansas City still has Tank Tyler and Turk McBride, neither was as productive as hoped in his rookie season. **GRADE: C+**

Linebackers » With so many desperate needs at other spots, this seemed an unlikely position for the highest-impact addition. However, the Chiefs went out and signed Demorrio Williams from Atlanta in the opening days of free agency. Williams, a fine athlete with good coverage skills and the ability to be an effective blitzer, will be given a chance to start at right outside linebacker. The incumbent at that spot, Donnie Edwards, played well last season before injuring a hamstring. But Edwards is 35 and will move to the middle, where he has played before, and could be effective in the cover-2 system because of his range.

Derrick Johnson is the other starter on the outside. Johnson is a quality player who could enter into serious Pro Bowl discussion if he makes more big plays. The odd man out could be Napoleon Harris. Signed as a free agent last year to man the middle, Harris didn't have the impact the Chiefs had anticipated and failed to make many big plays. Now he'll be the first linebacker off the bench. Johnny Baldwin and Nate Harris are developmental prospects who have ability but must prove themselves in training camp and during the preseason. **GRADE: C+**

Secondary » The Chiefs were limited in what they could do defensively last season because their cornerbacks were aging and slow. They moved to remedy that by releasing Ty Law and drafting Virginia Tech's Brandon Flowers in the second round. Flowers will become an immediate starter. He doesn't have great speed but is faster than Law, so the Chiefs feel better about leaving him alone in one-on-one coverage. Flowers is small but plays much bigger. A reliable tackler, he isn't afraid to come up and hit bigger ballcarriers, so he won't be a liability in run support.

Patrick Surtain retains the other starting spot, but the Chiefs will groom fifth-round pick Brandon Carr to eventually replace him. Tyron Brackenridge played well last year as a rookie at nickel back. The Chiefs established Jarrad Page and Bernard Pollard as the starting safeties last year and could begin to reap the benefits this season. Page is a smart, instinctive player who

THE BOOK ON ... TONY GONZALEZ *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"Sooner or later, Tony Gonzalez has to slow down. He's what now, 32? But to tell you the truth, we haven't seen that from him yet. Maybe he doesn't run as well as he used to, but that was never his game anyway. He's still a great athlete, so you can't sleep on him defensively. He'll still go and get the ball as well as he ever did, so the coverage had better be in place or he's going to burn you. It's always been difficult to decide how to cover him. Teams have had some success using cornerbacks on him, but he's capable of taking advantage of a size mismatch. He'll be the guy making the catch in a contested environment almost every time. I see him being as important as ever in that offense. They've got a young quarterback and they're going to a system where the passing game is more about ball control, so he needs to have another big year for them."

CHIEFS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1 Willie Lanier *(1967-77)*

Lanier, who led the Chiefs to victory in Super Bowl 4, was perhaps the top middle linebacker of his era, making eight Pro Bowls.

2 Bobby Bell *(1963-74)*

Bell, who was chosen first-team All-Pro seven times, is considered by many to be the most complete outside linebacker to ever play the game.

3 Derrick Thomas *(1989-99)*

Few players rushed the quarterback better than this nine-time Pro Bowler, who had 20 sacks in 1990.

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/09	L	3-20	at Houston Texans
09/16	L	10-20	at Chicago Bears
09/23	W	13-10	Minnesota Vikings
09/30	W	30-16	at San Diego Chargers
10/07	L	7-17	Jacksonville Jaguars
10/14	W	27-20	Cincinnati Bengals
10/21	W	12-10	at Oakland Raiders
11/04	L	22-33	Green Bay Packers
11/11	L	11-27	Denver Broncos
11/18	L	10-13	at Indianapolis Colts
11/25	L	17-20	Oakland Raiders
12/02	L	10-24	San Diego Chargers
12/09	L	7-41	at Denver Broncos
12/16	L	17-26	Tennessee Titans
12/23	L	20-25	at Detroit Lions
12/30	L	10-13	at New York Jets

WON 4, LOST 12

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Johnson	158	559	3.5	54	3
Smith	112	407	3.6	19	2
Holmes	46	137	3.0	11	0
Bennett	20	52	2.6	12	0
Battle	14	47	3.4	6	1
Croyle	7	18	2.6	6	0
Harris	9	9	1.0	4	0
Wilson	3	7	2.3	5	0
Kennison	1	5	5.0	5	0
Webb	1	5	5.0	5	0
McGraw	1	4	4.0	4	0
Parker	1	2	2.0	2	0
Huard	9	-1	-0.1	2	0
Drummond	1	-3	-3.0	-3	0
CHIEFS	383	1248	3.3	54	6
OPPONENTS	481	2089	4.3	53	11

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Gonzalez	99	1172	11.8	31	5
Bowe	70	995	14.2	58	5
Johnson	30	186	6.2	30t	1
Webb	28	313	11.2	32	1
Parker	24	298	12.4	24	2
Wilson	24	180	7.5	31	1
Smith	22	148	6.7	17	0
Kennison	13	101	7.8	18	0
Bennett	10	47	4.7	9	0
Holmes	5	17	3.4	8	0
Harris	3	38	12.7	19	0
Allen	2	3	1.5	2t	2
Dunn	2	9	4.5	8	0
Grigsby	2	14	7.0	9	0
Battle	1	4	4.0	4	0
CHIEFS	335	3525	10.5	58	17
OPPONENTS	276	3274	11.9	77t	17

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Huard	332	206	2257	11	13
Croyle	224	127	1227	6	6
Thigpen	6	2	41	0	1
Johnson	1	0	0	0	0
CHIEFS	563	335	3525	17	20
OPPONENTS	462	276	3274	17	14

SACKS CHIEFS 37, OPPONENTS 55

Allen 15.5, Hali 7.5, Johnson 4, Edwards 3, Edwards 2, Harris 1.5, Boone 1, McBride 1, Pollard 1, Wilkerson 0.5

ALBERT DICKSON / SN

DWAYNE BOWE ▶ WR

ALBERT DICKSON / SN

has good ball skills. Pollard can be fooled at times but is a big hitter. **GRADE: C**

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Chiefs will try to energize what was one of the league's worst return games with the additions of free-agent return specialist B.J. Sams and sixth-round draft pick Kevin Robinson. Sams might not be the answer. While he was once a premier return man, he missed almost all of last season with torn knee ligaments. Robinson was a standout returner at Utah State. He isn't particularly fast but does display a knack for the job.

Whoever wins the job won't make much of a difference without vastly improved blocking. The Chiefs generally did a good job in coverage last season, but they lost several key players. While they won't be starting from scratch, they have several holes to fill.

Dustin Colquitt had another strong season and is becoming one of the league's best punters. His left-footed punts are high and easy to cover. They can also be difficult for opposing returners to field. The Chiefs may eventually re-sign veteran John Carney as their placekicker. That would be a wise move, because Carney is still reliable from inside 40 yards. Otherwise, journeyman Nick Novak will be given the first shot to win the job. Novak has ability and would be better on kickoffs than Carney. **GRADE: D**

BOTTOM LINE

The ambitious rebuilding project the Chiefs have assumed precludes them from a playoff run. Too many things need to fall into place too quickly. The offense must adapt to Gailey and his new system. Croyle has to give the Chiefs more than he did last year. Numerous rookies and other young players have to grow up quickly. It's unreasonable to expect all of that to happen. A more reasonable expectation is for the Chiefs to become more competitive as the season wears on.

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FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT

STEADY

ROSTER

#	QUARTERBACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
12	Croyle, Brodie	QB	6-2	206	02/06/1983	2	Alabama
8	Greene, David	QB	6-3	226	06/22/1982	0	Georgia
11	Huard, Damon	QB	6-3	218	07/09/1973	7	Washington
4	Thigpen, Tyler	QB	6-1	225	04/14/1984	1	Coastal Carolina

#	OFFENSIVE LINE	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
79	Alabi, Anthony	T	6-5	315	02/16/1981	2	TCU
51	Darche, Jean-Philippe	C	6-0	242	02/28/1975	8	McGill
73	Jones, Adrian	T	6-5	296	06/10/1981	4	Kansas
60	Leffew, Travis	G	6-4	292	01/27/1983	0	Louisville
77	McIntosh, Damion	T	6-4	328	03/25/1977	8	Kansas State
64	Niswanger, Rudy	C	6-5	301	11/09/1982	2	LSU
66	Smith, Rob	G	6-3	311	03/08/1984	1	Tennessee
74	Smith, Wade	C	6-4	318	04/26/1981	4	Memphis
61	Stallings, Tre	G	6-3	315	01/08/1983	1	Mississippi
71	Svitek, Will	T	6-6	300	01/08/1982	3	Stanford
65	Taylor, Herb	T	6-3	295	09/22/1984	1	TCU
54	Waters, Brian	G	6-3	320	02/18/1977	8	North Texas

#	RUNNING BACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
26	Battle, Jackie	RB	6-2	238	10/01/1983	1	Houston
46	Hoyte, Oliver	RB	6-3	250	10/05/1984	2	North Carolina State
27	Johnson, Larry	RB	6-1	230	11/19/1979	5	Penn State
43	Manderino, Chris	RB	6-0	233	12/22/1982	0	California
21	Smith, Kolby	RB	5-11	218	12/15/1984	1	Louisville

#	RECEIVERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
81	Allan, Michael	TE	6-6	254	09/08/1983	0	Whitworth
82	Bowe, Dwayne	WR	6-2	221	09/21/1984	1	LSU
89	Darling, Devard	WR	6-1	215	04/16/1982	4	Washington State
84	Foschi, John Paul	TE	6-4	270	05/18/1982	2	Georgia Tech
88	Gonzalez, Tony	TE	6-5	251	02/27/1976	11	California
83	Sippio, Bobby	WR	6-3	214	12/04/1980	1	Western Kentucky
80	Webb, Jeff	WR	6-2	211	01/31/1982	2	San Diego State

#	DEFENSIVE LINE	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
70	Boone, Alfonso	DT	6-3	304	01/11/1976	7	Mount San Antonio JC
95	Edwards, Ron	DT	6-3	315	07/12/1979	7	Texas A&M
91	Hali, Tamba	DE	6-3	275	11/03/1983	2	Penn State
99	Jackson, T.J.	DT	6-1	311	12/12/1983	1	Auburn
90	McBride, Turk	DT	6-2	278	05/30/1985	1	Tennessee
93	Tyler, Tank	DT	6-2	306	02/14/1985	1	North Carolina State

#	DEFENSIVE BACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
35	Barksdale, Rashad	CB	5-11	208	05/11/1984	1	Albany
34	Brackenridge, Tyron	CB	5-11	188	06/30/1984	1	Washington State
45	Harris, Erick	S	5-11	208	12/17/1982	0	Liberty
47	McGraw, Jon	S	6-3	206	04/02/1979	6	Kansas State
44	Page, Jarrad	S	6-0	225	10/19/1984	2	UCLA
22	Patterson, Dimitri	CB	5-10	190	06/18/1983	2	Tuskegee
49	Pollard, Bernard	S	6-1	224	12/23/1984	2	Purdue
30	Sams, B.J.	CB	5-10	185	10/29/1980	4	McNeese State
23	Surtain, Patrick	CB	5-11	195	06/19/1976	10	Southern Miss
25	Wesley, Greg	S	6-2	206	03/19/1978	8	Arkansas-Pine Bluff

#	LINEBACKERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
57	Baldwin, Johnny	LB	6-1	230	04/01/1984	1	Alabama A&M
59	Edwards, Donnie	LB	6-2	227	04/06/1973	12	UCLA
50	Harris, Napoleon	LB	6-2	255	02/25/1979	6	Northwestern
98	Harris, Nate	LB	6-0	230	03/08/1983	1	Louisville
56	Johnson, Derrick	LB	6-3	242	11/22/1982	3	Texas
55	Thomas, Pat	LB	6-1	237	01/26/1983	3	North Carolina State
53	Williams, Demorrio	LB	6-0	232	07/06/1980	4	Nebraska

#	KICKERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
2	Colquitt, Dustin	P	6-3	210	05/06/1982	3	Tennessee
1	Cundiff, Billy	K	6-1	201	03/30/1980	5	Drake
9	Novak, Nick	K	6-0	189	08/21/1981	2	Maryland

▶ **HERM EDWARDS,** *Head coach*

Gunther Cunningham, def. coord./linebackers; **Chan Gailey**, off. coord.; **Bob Bicknell**, off. line; **Dick Curl**, asst. head coach/quarterbacks; **Joe D'Alessandris**, asst. off. line; **Jon Embree**, tight ends; **David Gibbs**, def. backs; **Michael Ketchum**, def. asst.; **Tim Krumrie**, def. line; **Curtis Modkins**, running backs; **Eric Price**, wide receivers; **Mike Priefer**, special teams

MIAMI DOLPHINS

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE

(an opponent breaks down the Dolphins)

"Considering this entire coaching staff and personnel department was responsible for rebuilding the Cowboys, that's pretty much how teams around the league will plan for the Dolphins early in the season. So it hasn't been a surprise to anyone that Miami is trying to load up with big, tough, nasty players. That's the Bill Parcells way. If you're trying to knock a wall down, would you rather use a dump truck or a VW? Parcells wants guys that don't wear down fast. He wants guys who can take punishment; big, smart, savvy guys who are constantly in the weight room. That's going to be the strength of this team: The players will be well-disciplined, heavy-lifting machines.

"Of course, there's a downside to that. As a result, the team probably won't be as athletic as it needs to be. Since they are more interested in building up the trenches, they are less likely to have the type of skill players that it's going to take to open up an effective passing game. With all of those big guys, they're limited athletically at times. You'd like the best of both worlds, but you're not going to get that. Parcells believes if a guy is tough, his motor will compensate for limited natural gifts."

Fins getting used to a big plate of Tuna helper

By Jeff Darlington, *Miami Herald*

Some 13 years after his retirement, legendary Dolphins coach Don Shula serves these days as nothing more than a devout fan when it comes to his once-proud franchise. His recent sentiment, however, still serves as the clearest representation of the general opinion echoed by South Floridians these days.

"There's nowhere to go but up!" Shula says, when asked what he thinks about the current direction of the team.

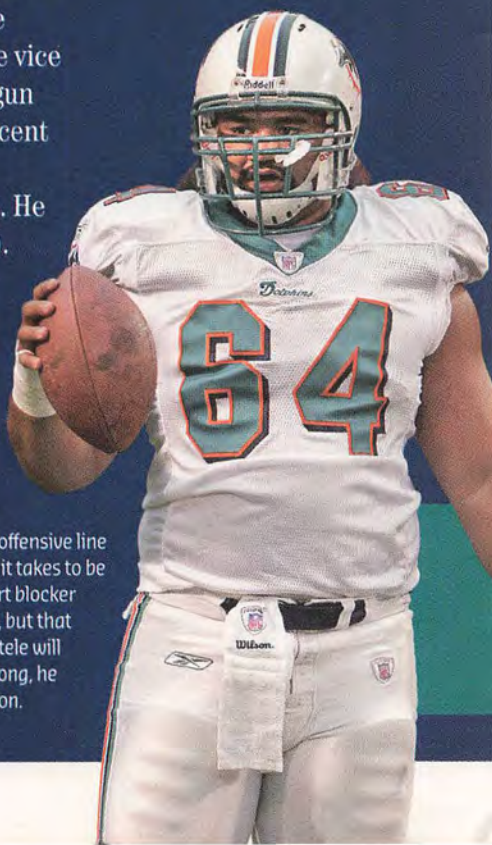
In the most literal sense, after a historically pathetic 1-15 season, the Dolphins clearly can't get much worse. Now, the team is relying on another football legend—Bill Parcells—to regain the pride that Shula once brought to this team. Since Parcells' arrival as the vice president of football operations, the team has begun a drastic reconstruction unlike any of its other recent attempts at repair.

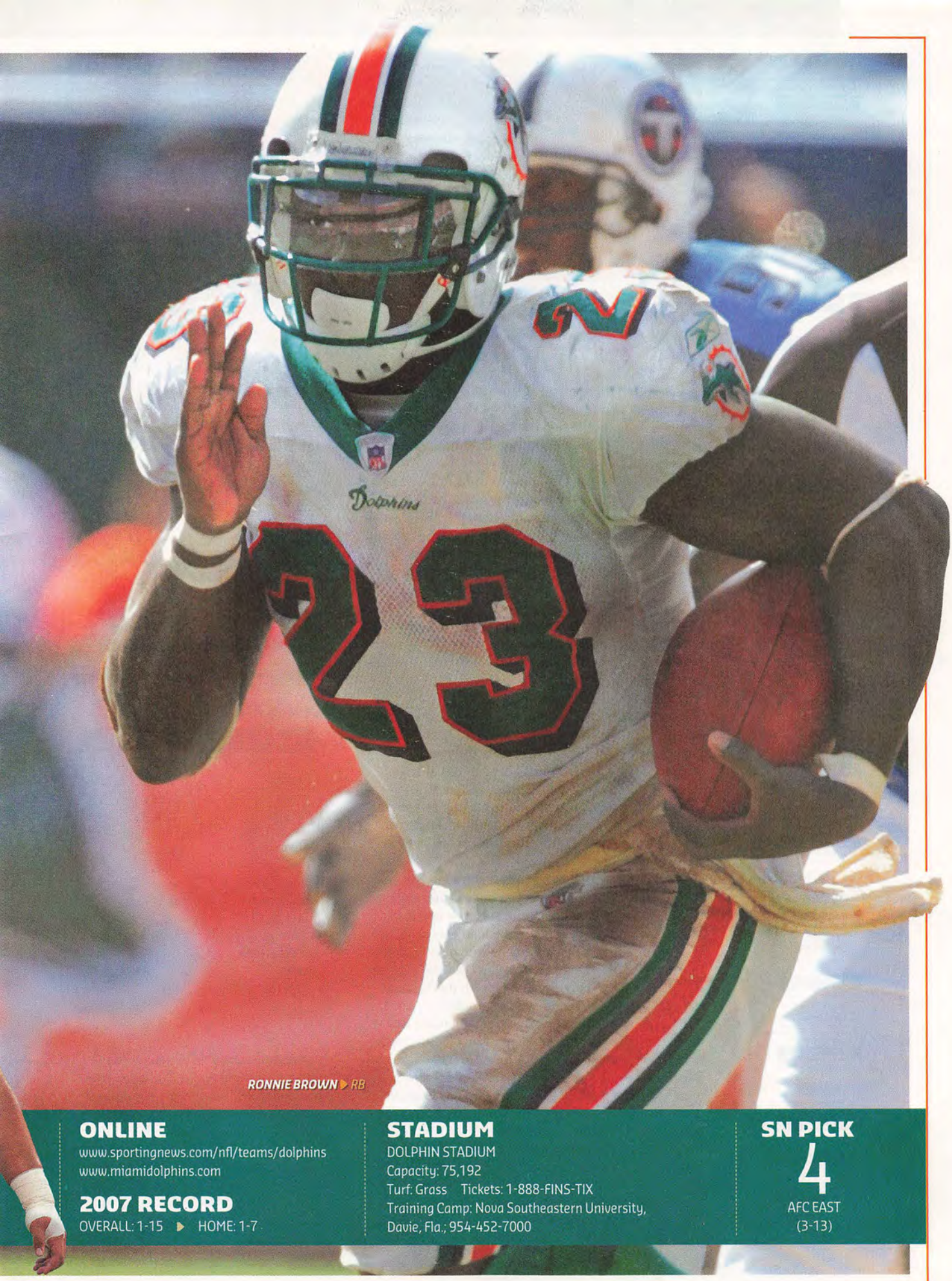
Parcells hired a new coach (from the Cowboys). He hired a new general manager (from the Cowboys). And he has replaced a bundle of older players with new ones, many of which came from—you guessed it—the Cowboys.

BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

SAMSON SATELE ▸ C

During his first season, Satele often earned the praise of longtime offensive line coach Hudson Houck, who believes the second-year player has what it takes to be a mainstay in this league for a very long time. Satele is a strong, smart blocker with exceptional leverage. He struggled at times last year as a rookie, but that might have been the result of a weak roster around him. Now that Satele will have an improved supporting cast, including No. 1 overall pick Jake Long, he could even be on the verge of emerging as an elite player at his position.





RONNIE BROWN ▶ RB

ONLINE

www.sportingnews.com/nfl/teams/dolphins
www.miamidolphins.com

2007 RECORD

OVERALL: 1-15 ▶ HOME: 1-7

STADIUM

DOLPHIN STADIUM
Capacity: 75,192
Turf: Grass Tickets: 1-888-FINS-TIX
Training Camp: Nova Southeastern University, Davie, Fla.; 954-452-7000

SN PICK

4
AFC EAST
(3-13)

(OPPOSITE): JULIE SCHEIDEGGER / US PRESSWIRE; BOB LEVERONE / SN

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 New York Jets
SEPT. 7 | 1:00
—
SCORE

WEEK 2 @ Arizona
SEPT. 14 | 4:15
—
SCORE

WEEK 3 @ New England
SEPT. 21 | 1:00
—
SCORE

WEEK 4 *OPEN DATE*

WEEK 5 San Diego
OCT. 5 | 1:00
—
SCORE

WEEK 6 @ Houston
OCT. 12 | 1:00
—
SCORE

WEEK 7 Baltimore
OCT. 19 | 1:00
—
SCORE

WEEK 8 Buffalo
OCT. 26 | 1:00
—
SCORE

WEEK 9 @ Denver
NOV. 2 | 4:05
—
SCORE

WEEK 10 Seattle
NOV. 9 | 1:00
—
SCORE

WEEK 11 Oakland
NOV. 16 | 1:00
—
SCORE

WEEK 12 New England
NOV. 23 | 1:00
—
SCORE

WEEK 13 @ St. Louis
NOV. 30 | 1:00
—
SCORE

WEEK 14 @ Buffalo *(in Toronto)*
DEC. 7 | 4:05
—
SCORE

WEEK 15 San Francisco
DEC. 14 | 1:00
—
SCORE

WEEK 16 @ Kansas City
DEC. 21 | 1:00
—
SCORE

WEEK 17 @ New York Jets
DEC. 28 | 1:00
—
SCORE

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

THE BOOK ON ... JASON TAYLOR *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"First of all, he's an absolutely great athlete. He's a longtime, smart veteran, so he knows a lot about every offensive lineman he goes up against. As a result, he understands what those tackles can and can't handle. One problem last year was that he didn't look as strong or as big as he has in the past. That caused him to get locked up when he was facing bigger players. He's got to beat people off the jump. That's why you see him get off really wide and rush off the far edge. He can beat you with the speed. Then, he'll give you a counter inside when the offensive tackle starts oversetting. He understands how to set things up.

"He also has deceptive strength, so if he can get up into the midsection of a lineman, he knows how to drive them back. And even though he's still not quite as strong as some guys, he uses his athleticism and leverage to compensate for it. There were occasionally times he'd struggle last year when teams would run a tight end directly at him. That's the best way to take him off his game—take him head on."

Just as he did during his time in Dallas, Parcells is trying to change the climate of the team's locker room by bringing in big, tough, disciplined players with the kind of blue-collar leadership the new boss loves.

Miami is bolstering its special-teams units while rebuilding the lines on both sides of the ball. Still, with questions remaining at quarterback along with a lack of talent at the skill positions, this latest attempt to turn these guppies into big fish isn't going to be easy—even with a Big Tuna leading the school.

OFFENSE

When the Dolphins' new coaching staff took over, they immediately made sure three words were painted in huge letters on the main wall in the team's general meeting room:

Smart. Tough. Disciplined.

Nowhere in the room, though, does it say anything about finesse, grace or elegance. Nobody should expect as much from the Dolphins' offense. This instead is going to be a hard-nosed unit that relies on powerful running backs, brutal fullbacks and a one-play-at-a-time battling mindset in the trenches. The running backs are likely to be the strength of this team. Miami is likely to utilize that strength as often as possible.

Quarterbacks » When quarterback John Beck's lack of height came up during an offseason conversation between Beck and Parcells, the boss was quick to give the second-year quarterback an encouraging vote of confidence. When Parcells won his two Super Bowls, it wasn't with taller guys like Drew Bledsoe in New England or Vinny Testaverde with the Jets, but rather 6-foot-2 Phil Simms with the Giants.

Parcells reminded Beck that fundamentals, intelligence and leadership could allow any quarterback to overcome slight size limitations. Conversations like these have revealed a certain level of endorsement from the staff. Dolphins coach Tony Sparano pointed out that Beck had thrown nearly 5,000 balls before training camp began, and quarterbacks coach David Lee is apparently working well with Beck at making slight tweaks to his throwing motion so his point of release is high enough to clear tall offensive linemen. If this NFL crash course goes well, expect Beck to enter the season as the starter, while veteran Josh McCown serves as a worthy backup given his in-game experience. **GRADE: D**

5-YEAR WINS TREND

NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	287.5	28
RUSHING	98.1	23
PASSING	189.4	24
SCORING	267	26t
PUNT RETURNS	9.6	10
KICK RETURNS	19.9	29
RED ZONE TD %	51.3	17
TOTAL DEFENSE	342.2	23
AGAINST RUSH	153.5	32
AGAINST PASS	188.7	4
POINTS ALLOWED	437	30
INTERCEPTIONS	14	23t
SACKS	30	24
TURNOVER DIFF.	-7	22t

Running backs » Welcome to the latest chapter of Ricky Williams' controversial NFL career. In yet another bizarre twist, Williams is apparently poised to vault himself back into the mix of the NFL's elite. And the new regime is taking note. Williams has been in the team's training facility as often—if not more—than nearly every other player on the roster. His body is in impeccable shape, and his speed is rumored to be back at a level that

JAMES D. SMITH / ICON SMI

once made him dynamic. Even with that good news, Williams will be 31 when the season begins—and he has played in only one NFL game over the past two seasons. Running back Ronnie Brown will enter training camp as the starter, but he'll need to prove that he is fully recovered from last season's ACL tear before he gains a full vote of confidence. Brown was on a Pro Bowl pace last season before he suffered the injury in Week 7, which is somewhat assuring since he at least showed the flashes of brilliance that created a more stable situation heading into the offseason. At this point, the tandem of Brown and Williams has the potential to be very good. But given Williams' unreliability and Brown's knee injury, it also has the potential to be seriously problematic. **GRADE: B+**

Receivers » This group prompted the biggest questions on offense entering training camp and, indeed, the Dolphins' corps of wide receivers is thin and inexperienced. Yes, there's some potential within the group of Ted Ginn Jr., Derek Hagan and Ernest Wilford, but none of them have the background to guarantee they will step up as the elite receiver needed to open up this offense. Ginn's speed is certainly his biggest asset, and his route-running is improving, but he still has a ways to go to be a primary receiver. After two years, Hagan simply needs to become more consistent and limit his drops to produce like a No. 2 receiver.

Given his experience as a starter for a competitive team like Jacksonville, Wilford might actually be the most likely to emerge as the team's go-to guy. He has the size (6-4, 223 pounds) that Miami's staff likes, and he uses that size and power well enough to make himself an easy target. **GRADE: D**

Offensive line » For the past several years, the Dolphins have consistently entered training camp without a set offensive line, resulting in a patchwork process that has led to slow starts and a lack of chemistry. It appears, however, that Miami is finally working hard to change the stability of the unit. And this could be the perfect staff to do just that. Sparano is an offensive-line guru, and Parcells loves finding developmental projects with enough size to be molded into starters. That's why this year's NFL Draft was critical for the future of the Dolphins' trenches. The team selected three offensive linemen, including No. 1 overall pick Jake Long. He will play left tackle and was a crucial addition, because he allows Vernon Carey to move back to his more natural role on the right side of the line. Carey appeared to be on the verge of becoming one of the league's top right tackles two years ago, but a lack

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		
QB	John Beck	Josh McCown
FB	Ronnie Brown	Ricky Williams
RB	Reagan Mauia	Boomer Grigsby
WR	Ted Ginn Jr.	Ernest Wilford
WR	Derek Hagan	Greg Camarillo
TE	David Martin	Justin Peelle
LT	Jake Long	Cory Lekkerkerker
LG	Drew Mormino	Shawn Murphy
C	Samson Satele	Mike Byrne
RG	Justin Smiley	Shawn Murphy
RT	Vernon Carey	Julius Wilson
DEFENSE		
LE	Matt Roth	Kendall Langford
NT	Jason Ferguson	Randy Starks
DT	Vonnie Holliday	Rodrique Wright
RE	Jason Taylor	Phillip Merling
LB	Reggie Torbor	Keith Davis
LB	Channing Crowder	Akin Ayodele
LB	Joey Porter	Reggie Torbor
CB	Will Allen	Courtney Bryan
CB	Michael Lehan	Travis Daniels
FS	Yeremiah Bell	Jason Allen
SS	Renaldo Hill	Courtney Bryan
SPECIALISTS		
K	Jay Feely	
P	Brandon Fields	
KR	Ted Ginn Jr.	
PR	Ted Ginn Jr.	
LS	John Denney	

DOLPHINS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1 **Zach Thomas** *(1996-2007)*

Fifth-round pick out of Texas Tech has proven draft experts wrong by making seven Pro Bowls.

2 **Nick Buoniconti** *(1969-76)*

At 5-11, he packed quite a punch in the middle for the Miami dynasty of the early 1970s and was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2001.

3 **Bryan Cox** *(1991-95)*

Made as much noise with his sacks (51.5 career) as he did with his mouth.

JOEL AUERBACH / US PRESSWIRE

» DRAFT REPORT GRADE ▸ B-

While **Jake Long** may not have been the best prospect in the draft, he's exactly the type of player Bill Parcells wants in Miami: a tough, competitive leader with outstanding intangibles. Plus, the Dolphins need help on the offensive line, and Long will be installed at left tackle from Day 1. Miami was fortunate to find DE **Phillip Merling** in the second round. Merling was a top player at his position and can start at either end spot in the 3-4. A better athlete than he receives credit for, Merling plays with a competitive streak. **Chad Henne** has never proven he can make big throws in big situations and was a reach at No. 57. Henne has the physical tools, but he must learn to be effective when pressured and forced to move his feet. **Kendall Langford**, a big and athletic defensive end, is an ideal fit for the 3-4 defense, but he must play with vastly improved technique to reach his potential. Guard **Shawn Murphy**, the son of former Atlanta Braves outfielder Dale Murphy, is a good athlete and plays with passion and aggression. This may be why Parcells overlooked his undeveloped technical skill; Murphy has only played on the offensive line for two years. Running backs **Jalen Parmele** and **Lex Hilliard** had value in the sixth round. Both are strong, well-built backs who run hard and break tackles. Guard **Donald Thomas** was another good sixth-round pickup. Strong and athletic, he could become a starter with more consistent effort and technique. Defensive lineman **Lionel Dotson** has good size and athletic ability but must play with greater intensity to stick in the league.

» 2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
1	1	Long, Jake	T	6-7	315	Michigan
2	1	Merling, Phillip	DE	6-5	270	Clemson
2	26	Henne, Chad	QB	6-2	226	Michigan
3	3	Langford, Kendall	DE	6-6	294	Hampton
4	11	Murphy, Shawn	T	6-5	315	Utah State
6	10	Parmele, Jalen	RB	6-0	221	Toledo
6	29	Thomas, Donald	G	6-4	303	Connecticut
6	38	Hilliard, Lex	RB	5-11	228	Montana
7	38	Dotson, Lionel	DE	6-4	296	Arizona

ROSTER

#	QUARTERBACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
9	Beck, John	QB	6-2	216	08/21/1981	1	Brigham Young
4	McCown, Josh	QB	6-4	213	07/04/1979	6	Sam Houston State

#	OFFENSIVE LINE	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
72	Carey, Vernon	T	6-5	335	07/13/1981	4	Miami (FL)
69	Darilek, Trey	C	6-5	310	04/23/1981	2	UTEP
77	Mormino, Drew	C	6-4	301	11/20/1983	0	Central Michigan
68	Ndukwe, Ikechuku	G	6-4	338	07/17/1982	1	Northwestern
	Cory Lekkerkerker	T	6-7	323	07/25/1981	3	UC-Davis
64	Satele, Samson	C	6-3	300	11/29/1984	1	Hawaii
65	Smiley, Justin	G	6-3	311	11/11/1981	4	Alabama
78	Wilson, Julius	T	6-4	327	10/17/1983	0	UAB

#	RUNNING BACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
23	Brown, Ronnie	RB	6-0	232	12/12/1981	3	Auburn
38	Cobbs, Patrick	RB	5-8	210	01/31/1983	2	North Texas
46	Grigsby, Boomer	RB	5-11	249	11/15/1981	3	Illinois State
45	Mauia, Reagan	RB	6-0	270	07/06/1984	1	Hawaii
34	Williams, Ricky	RB	5-10	226	05/21/1977	7	Texas

#	RECEIVERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
83	Camarillo, Greg	WR	6-1	190	04/18/1982	2	Stanford
81	Fasano, Anthony	TE	6-4	258	04/20/1984	2	Notre Dame
19	Ginn Jr., Ted	WR	5-11	178	04/12/1985	1	Ohio State
82	Hagan, Derek	WR	6-2	203	09/21/1984	2	Arizona State
80	Halterman, Aaron	TE	6-4	255	03/31/1982	1	Indiana
85	Kircus, David	WR	6-2	192	02/19/1980	3	Grand Valley State
88	Martin, David	TE	6-4	265	03/13/1979	7	Tennessee
87	Peelle, Justin	TE	6-4	255	03/15/1979	6	Oregon
17	Perry, Tab	WR	6-3	208	01/20/1982	3	UCLA
89	Ryan, Sean	TE	6-5	265	03/27/1980	4	Boston College
18	Wilford, Ernest	WR	6-4	223	01/14/1979	4	Virginia Tech

#	DEFENSIVE LINE	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
92	Denney, John	DE	6-5	270	12/13/1978	3	Brigham Young
95	Ferguson, Jason	DT	6-3	310	11/28/1974	10	Georgia
91	Holliday, Vonnie	DE	6-5	288	12/11/1975	10	North Carolina
74	Moses, Quentin	DE	6-5	260	11/18/1983	1	Georgia
93	Ninkovich, Rob	DE	6-2	252	02/01/1984	2	Purdue
98	Roth, Matt	DE	6-4	272	10/14/1982	3	Iowa
96	Soliai, Paul	DE	6-4	344	12/30/1983	1	Utah
94	Starks, Randy	DT	6-3	312	12/14/1983	4	Maryland
99	Taylor, Jason	DE	6-6	255	09/01/1974	11	Akron
90	Wright, Rodrique	DE	6-5	300	07/31/1984	1	Texas

#	DEFENSIVE BACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
32	Allen, Jason	S	6-1	213	07/05/1983	2	Tennessee
25	Allen, Will	CB	5-10	196	08/05/1978	7	Syracuse
37	Bell, Yeremiah	S	6-0	200	03/03/1978	4	Eastern Kentucky
47	Bryan, Courtney	S	6-0	202	10/02/1984	1	New Mexico State
20	Crocker, Chris	S	5-11	192	03/09/1980	5	Marshall
29	Daniels, Travis	S	6-1	192	09/08/1982	3	LSU
28	Davis, Keith	S	5-11	205	12/30/1978	5	Sam Houston State
21	Goodman, André	CB	5-10	185	08/11/1978	6	South Carolina
24	Hill, Renaldo	S	5-11	190	11/12/1978	7	Michigan State
33	Jones, Nathan	CB	5-10	192	06/13/1982	4	Rutgers
22	Lehan, Michael	CB	6-0	190	11/25/1979	5	Minnesota
41	Thomas, Joey	CB	6-1	190	08/29/1980	2	Montana State

#	LINEBACKERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
56	Anderson, Charlie	LB	6-4	243	12/08/1981	4	Mississippi
51	Ayodele, Akin	LB	6-2	250	09/17/1979	6	Purdue
52	Crowder, Channing	LB	6-2	245	12/02/1983	3	Florida
59	Glymph, Junior	LB	6-5	270	09/02/1980	3	Carson-Newman
50	Miles, Edmond	LB	6-0	230	07/06/1984	1	Iowa
55	Porter, Joey	LB	6-3	250	03/22/1977	9	Colorado State
58	Smith, Kelvin	LB	6-2	233	03/20/1984	1	Syracuse
53	Torbor, Reggie	LB	6-2	250	01/25/1981	4	Auburn
53	Wright, Abraham	LB	6-3	245	10/15/1984	0	Colorado

#	KICKERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
3	Feely, Jay	K	5-10	210	05/23/1976	7	Michigan
2	Fields, Brandon	P	6-5	236	05/21/1984	1	Michigan State
16	Rayner, Dave	K	6-2	210	10/26/1982	3	Michigan State

▶ **TONY SPARANO,** *Head coach*

Dan Henning, off. coord.; **Paul Pasqualoni**, def. coord.; **John Bonamego**, special teams coord.; **Todd Bowles**, asst. head coach/secondary; **George DeLeone**, tight ends; **Karl Dorrell**, wide receivers; **George Edwards**, inside linebackers; **Steve Hoffman**, kicking; **David Lee**, quarterbacks; **Mike Maser**, off. line; **Jim Reid**, outside linebackers; **Kacy Rodgers**, defensive line; **James Saxon**, running backs

of talent on the line caused for his necessary (although reluctant) move to the left side.

Long should be the answer for better blind-side protection eventually. He needs to work on his pass-protection skills, but his run blocking will probably make him one of the better tackles in the league with some rapid development during training camp. The team is also excited about the prospect of having Samson Satele at center. Entering his second year, Satele is a very smart player who gains good leverage easily and will benefit from having better players around him. The key to the unit's turnaround will be the guard position. Miami added Justin Smiley during the offseason, and he'll probably get most of his work at left guard. Injury-prone in the past, he needs to stay healthy to keep this unit together. At right guard, watch for draft pick Shawn Murphy to emerge early as a starter. **GRADE: C+**

DEFENSE

Despite the general belief that Miami will operate in the same 3-4 scheme used by the Cowboys during the current regime's previous stint in Dallas, Sparano has left open the possibility of running a 4-3. The decision will likely be based on personnel evaluations during training camp, since most of the team's talent (like defensive end Jason Taylor) may be more suited to a four-man front. Defensive coordinator Paul Pasqualoni has a history with both schemes, and it's clear he's capable of installing either.

Defensive line » When the Dolphins pulled off a trade with the Cowboys for nose tackle Jason Ferguson, it might have been the most important move the team made for the defense in the offseason. Ferguson provides a much-needed peg to the Dolphins' front if the team transitions to a pure 3-4 system. He has the size (6-3, 310) and strength to tie up offensive linemen long enough to let his linebackers go to work, and already proved to be a fit in this system during his time in Dallas.

OFFSEASON MOVES

ADDITIONS:

QB **Josh McCown** *(FA/Raiders)*, DT **Jason Feruson** *(trade/Cowboys)*, G **Justin Smiley** *(FA/49ers)*, DT **Randy Starks** *(FA/Titans)*, WR **Ernest Wilford** *(FA/Jaguars)*, TE **Sean Ryan** *(FA/Jets)*, LB **Charlie Anderson** *(FA/Texans)*, LB **Reggie Torbor** *(FA/Giants)*, S **Keith Davis** *(FA/Cowboys)*, K **Dave Rayner** *(FA/Chargers)*, DB **Nathan Jones** *(FA/Cowboys)*, WR **Tab Perry** *(FA/Bengals)*, DB **Chris Crocker** *(FA/Falcons)*, TE **Anthony Fasano** *(trade/Cowboys)*, LB **Akin Ayodele** *(trade/Cowboys)*

SUBTRACTIONS:

DT **Anthony Bryant** *(FA)*, T **Anthony Alabi** *(FA/Chiefs)*, WR **Marty Booker** *(FA/Bears)*, T **L.J. Shelton** *(FA/Chargers)*, QB **Trent Green** *(FA/Rams)*, NT **Keith Traylor** *(FA)*, LB **Zach Thomas** *(FA/Cowboys)*. G **Gene Mruczkowski** *(FA)*, QB **Cleo Lemon** *(FA/Jaguars)*, LB **Derrick Pope** *(FA/Vikings)*, SS **Lance Schulters** *(FA)*, G **Chris Liwienski** *(FA)*, G **Mike Rosenthal** *(FA)*, DT **Chase Page** *(FA)*, RB **Samkon Gado** *(FA)*, RB **Jesse Chatman** *(FA/Jets)*, LB **Donnie Spragan** *(FA)*, C **Rex Hadnot** *(FA/Browns)*, SS **Cameron Worrell** *(FA)*

INSIDE THE HEADSET

GETTY IMAGES

TONY SPARANO

With no head-coaching experience, Sparano's most impressive credential at this point is simple: Bill Parcells hired him. Still, it's going to be very intriguing to watch the dynamic between Parcells and his coaching protégé. Will Parcells' looming shadow cause Sparano to be more conservative when it comes to his strategy? That remains to be seen. But it's going to be important for Sparano to take some gambles.

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BROWN | DEFENSE/ SPECIAL TEAMS | GINN

Dan Marino threw for 20 more touchdowns in 1984 (48) than Dolphins' quarterbacks have in the past two seasons (28). Don't count on John Beck to tie the score with 20 TD passes in 2008.

BUY Ronnie Brown, RB

SELL Defense/special teams

SLEEPER Ted Ginn Jr., WR

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/09	L	13-16	at Washington Redskins
09/16	L	20-37	Dallas Cowboys
09/23	L	28-31	at New York Jets
09/30	L	17-35	Oakland Raiders
10/07	L	19-22	at Houston Texans
10/14	L	31-41	at Cleveland Browns
10/21	L	28-49	New England Patriots
10/28	L	10-13	New York Giants
11/11	L	10-13	Buffalo Bills
11/18	L	7-17	at Philadelphia Eagles
11/26	L	0-3	at Pittsburgh Steelers
12/02	L	13-40	New York Jets
12/09	L	17-38	at Buffalo Bills
12/16	W	22-16	Baltimore Ravens
12/23	L	7-28	at New England Patriots
12/30	L	25-38	Cincinnati Bengals

WON 1, LOST 15

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Brown	119	602	5.1	60	4
Chatman	128	515	4.0	30	1
Booker	28	125	4.5	22	0
Gado	35	104	3.0	20t	3
Lemon	31	102	3.3	11	4
Cobbs	15	47	3.1	12	1
Green	7	32	4.6	23	0
Williams	6	15	2.5	6	0
Beck	9	12	1.3	8	1
Booker	2	12	6.0	12	0
Mauia	4	5	1.3	3	0
Ginn Jr.	4	3	0.8	7	0
Chambers	1	-5	-5.0	-5	0
DOLPHINS	**389**	**1569**	**4.0**	**60**	**14**
OPPONENTS	544	2456	4.5	59t	18

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Booker	50	556	11.1	26	1
Brown	39	389	10.0	43	1
Ginn Jr.	34	420	12.4	54	2
Martin	34	303	8.9	28	2
Chambers	31	415	13.4	28	0
Hagan	29	373	12.9	22t	2
Peelle	29	228	7.9	35	2
Booker	28	237	8.5	22	0
Chatman	27	161	6.0	22	0
Camarillo	8	160	20.0	64t	2
Gado	4	47	11.8	35	0
Cobbs	2	20	10.0	11	0
Mauia	2	5	2.5	5	0
Halterman	1	7	7.0	7	0
DOLPHINS	**318**	**3319**	**10.4**	**64t**	**12**
OPPONENTS	242	3186	13.2	70t	28

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Lemon	309	173	1773	6	6
Green	141	85	987	5	7
Beck	107	60	559	1	3
Booker	1	0	0	0	0
DOLPHINS	**558**	**318**	**3319**	**12**	**16**
OPPONENTS	409	242	3186	28	14

SACKS DOLPHINS 30, OPPONENTS 42

Taylor 11, Porter 5.5, Roth 3, Allen 2, Holliday 2, Moses 1.5, Wright 1.5, Lehan 1, Thomas 1, Traylor 1, Crowder 0.5

HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL

The Dolphins also like defensive end Matt Roth for the same reasons, and he's currently slated to be the starter at left end. Roth doesn't have elite athleticism, but he still has the energy and toughness the coaches admire. He'll still need to overcome one issue that has stunted his progress during his first two years: short arms. But if Roth can continue to build up his strength while also learning more about his position, this could be the year when that obstacle no longer holds him back.

Free agent-acquisition Randy Starks is likely to vie with Vonnie Holliday for the spot on the other end, but second-round draft pick Phillip Merling could also make an early push for playing time. Both Starks and Holliday have played tackle for much of their careers, but they could be better fits for the end spot in this system. In a 4-3 scheme, Holliday or Starks would move inside, shifting Taylor from outside linebacker to defensive end. But it appears Taylor is more likely to see the bulk of his action as a stand-up outside 'backer. **GRADE: B**

Linebackers For the first time in a decade, this unit will not be anchored by Zach Thomas, who had become the face of the franchise as its middle linebacker since 1996. The team released Thomas in the offseason when they determined he was too much of a health risk at his hefty salary. Thomas was the heart and soul of the defense and passed along a wealth of knowledge during film preparations to his teammates. Now, it's all on Channing Crowder to step up. Crowder has been a solid student under Thomas, and his energy and motor constantly place him near the ball on every play. But Crowder must now prove that he's also capable of making game-changing plays.

He'll have some solid players around him to help. On the outside, Taylor will be the roaming linebacker, playing a hybrid role that will allow him to create enough space to consistently challenge the quarterback. Taylor remains one of the league's best pass rushers, but it will be interesting to see how the new regime uses him.

At the other outside spot, Joey Porter could actually be well suited for this system. In a 3-4 system, free-agent pickup Reggie Torbor will play inside next to Crowder. **GRADE: C**

Secondary The Dolphins' secondary might have quantity—but it remains to be seen whether it also has quality. With six safeties on the roster, Miami hopes it will find a few solid standouts within the bunch. But aside from starter Yeremiah Bell at strong safety, who also comes with questions because of last year's torn Achilles tendon, the team doesn't really have any proven starters. Renaldo Hill might be the best bet at free safety, especially since 2006 first-round draft pick Jason Allen still hasn't done enough to live up to his expectations. At cornerback, the team has been pleased with Will Allen's potential, and he's a solid starter because of his one-on-one coverage skills. The slot opposite Allen, however, is much like free safety—open for competition. Travis Daniels and Michael Lehan will be candidates for playing time. **GRADE: B**

SPECIAL TEAMS

A big part of the rebuilding in Miami will be centered on improving the special teams. Last year's group was so hurt by injuries and lack of talent that the team actually began looking to everyday starters to contribute on kickoffs. This season, however, the Dolphins have added several tough, disciplined players who have excelled on special teams in the past, hoping to boost their chances to win the field-position battles. Linebacker Keith Davis and fullback Boomer Grigsby are two of the additions who could play an important wedge-busting role, giving kick returner Ginn more of an opportunity to break free. Ginn has the potential to be a very gifted returner, given his speed and agility. But he needs help, and the Dolphins are trying to give it to him. The team's kicking game should remain strong with the return of Jay Feely. One of the most consistent kickers in the league last year, Feely made 21 of 23 attempts. **GRADE: B**

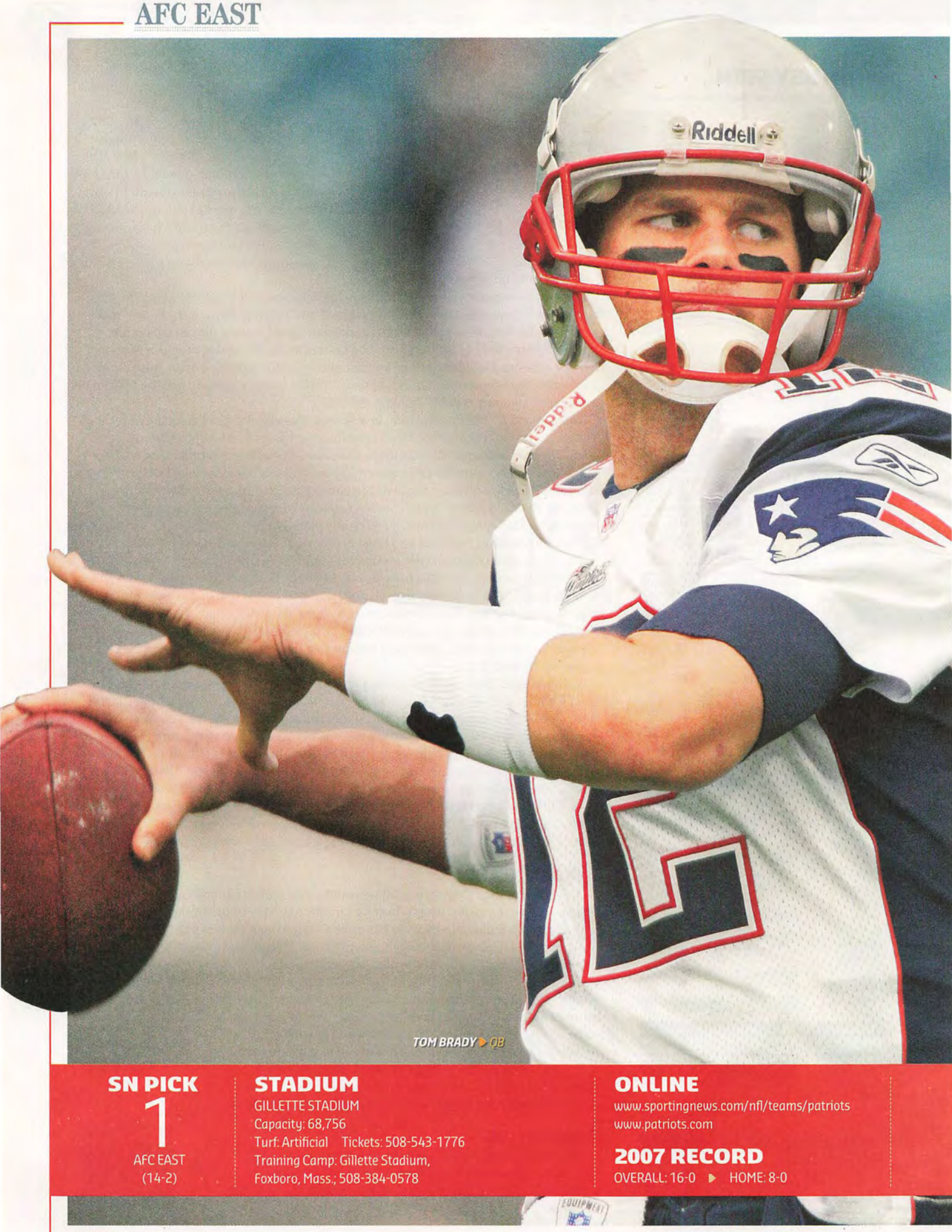
BOTTOM LINE

The Dolphins still don't have the talent to be a playoff contender. But at least they have hope. And optimism. And promise. That's certainly more than they had at the end of last season. At that point, all they had was one win.

70

FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT: **UP**



SN PICK
1
AFC EAST
(14-2)

STADIUM
GILLETTE STADIUM
Capacity: 68,756
Turf: Artificial Tickets: 508-543-1776
Training Camp: Gillette Stadium,
Foxboro, Mass.; 508-384-0578

ONLINE
www.sportingnews.com/nfl/teams/patriots
www.patriots.com

2007 RECORD
OVERALL: 16-0 ▶ HOME: 8-0

(L TO R): BOB LEVERONE / SN; ROBERT E. KLEIN / ICON SMI; HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS

Super Bowl disappointment won't slow Brady's bunch

By John Tomase, *Boston Herald*

It was all there for the taking. A championship. Perfection. History.

And then the Giants snatched it away.

Were the Patriots any other organization coached by any other man, the crushing defeat in Super Bowl 42 would likely mark the death knell for the franchise's run. Teams simply do not come back from that type of heartache. Just ask the 1986 Red Sox.

But the Patriots have proven relentless under coach Bill Belichick, shaking off both the sting of a last-minute loss in the 2006 AFC title game and the scandal of Spygate last year to run the table all the way to Arizona.

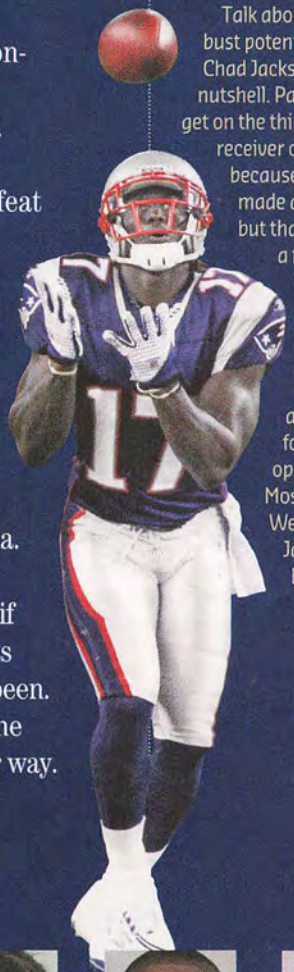
Belichick is a master motivator who keeps his team up week after week after week. And if the last eight years are any indication, his Pats aren't going to mope about what might have been.

They're going to start another assault on the NFL and dare everyone else to stand in their way.

BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

CHAD JACKSON ▶ WR

Talk about boom-or-bust potential. That's Chad Jackson in a nutshell. Patriots fans get on the third-year wide receiver out of Florida because he hasn't made an impact yet, but that's largely a function of health. With Donte' Stallworth gone, there's an opening for a burner opposite Randy Moss and Wes Welker, and Jackson could be that guy.



FANTASY SPIN

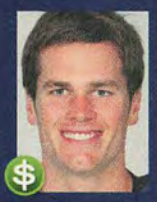
http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football

Randy Moss had a career-high nine 100-yard games and nine receptions of 40-plus yards in 2007. He also had nine touchdowns at Gillette Stadium. And if he's around at pick No. 9, take him.

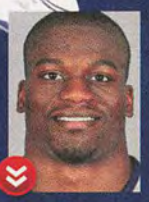
$ BUY » Tom Brady, QB

SELL » Ben Watson, TE

Z SLEEPER » Jabar Gaffney, WR



BRADY



WATSON

GAFFNEY

OFFENSE

While offensive coordinator Josh McDaniels has added some wrinkles—such as crafty screens and the occasional trick play—he's basically running a system that dates back to Charlie Weis. Even with Randy Moss stretching defenses, the Patriots make their living underneath to the likes of Kevin Faulk and Wes Welker. They prefer a controlled passing game and should be a classic "throw to get the lead, run to keep it" team in 2008.

Quarterbacks » In Matt Cassel and Kevin O'Connell, the Patriots have some intriguing backup options …

Oh, wait. You're probably here to read about Tom Brady.

What is there left to be said about the reigning MVP and all-time record holder for touchdown passes in a season? Thrust into a starting role in just his second pro season, Brady proved he could manage an overachieving team all the way to a Super Bowl upset of the Rams.

Two years later he led another Super Bowl rally, and a year after that, he became a three-time champion synonymous with putting winning ahead of individual glory.

Not that there's anything wrong with individual glory, as Brady proved during a magical 2007. He threw 50 TDs to eclipse Peyton Manning's record and solidified himself as the greatest winner, and maybe the best quarterback, of this generation.

He never looked quite right in last season's Super Bowl, though, and perhaps a high ankle sprain was to blame. Brady is healthy now and ready to roll. He turns 31 during training camp and is smack dab in the middle of his prime.

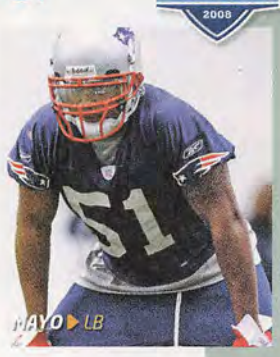
Don't be surprised if he reverts back to his previous form this year and doesn't challenge any records, instead calmly leading the Patriots on a march toward their fourth Super Bowl in eight years. **GRADE: A**

Running backs » He split carries his rookie year. He played with a split personality his second year.

Now in Year 3, we find out if Laurence Maroney is ready to be the elite running back the Patriots think he can be.

The stretch run of last season provided a glimpse into a potentially rewarding future. Maroney topped the

DRAFT REPORT GRADE ▸ C+



As usual, New England took a number of players conventional wisdom would deem reaches. But for almost a decade, the Patriots have been right more often than most. **Jerod Mayo**, the 10th overall selection, was largely considered a second-rounder, but his versatility, athleticism and instincts endeared him to the Pats. He's best suited to take over on the inside, where the unit has aged, but could start outside as well. He should develop into a playmaker quickly. Athletic CB **Terrence Wheatley** has the footwork, quickness, hips, agility and speed to stay with receivers in man-to-man coverage. However, he does not consistently make plays on the ball, and his right wrist is fused together following multiple surgeries. The Pats batted twice in the third round and came away with a home run and a strikeout. **Kevin O'Connell** is a talented QB with the quick release, arm strength and accuracy to make all the necessary throws, though he must improve his footwork. **Shawn Crable**, meanwhile, is a classic defensive end/outside linebacker 'tweener who lacks the explosiveness to consistently pressure the QB off the edge and the athleticism to become a full-time linebacker. He will struggle to see the field. Cornerback **Jonathan Wilhite** may not be as athletic as Wheatley but has better toughness and instincts and will eventually develop into a quality starter. **Matt Slater** did not play much on offense or defense for UCLA but was the best special teams player in the Pac-10 and will make an immediate impact as a gunner. **Bo Ruud** in the type of linebacker who, despite limited athleticism, can stick as a backup because of his strength, toughness and competitive streak.

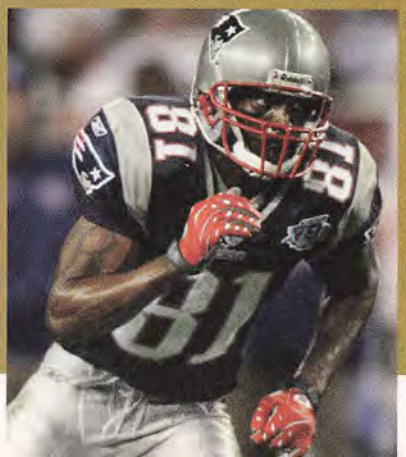
2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
1	10	Mayo, Jerod	LB	6-2	230	Tennessee
2	31	Wheatley, Terrence	CB	5-9	178	Colorado
3	15	Crable, Shawn	LB	6-5	243	Michigan
3	31	O'Connell, Kevin	QB	6-6	235	San Diego State
4	30	Wilhite, Jonathan	CB	5-10	185	Auburn
5	18	Slater, Matthew	WR	6-0	194	UCLA
6	31	Ruud, Bo	LB	6-4	234	Nebraska

5-YEAR WINS TREND

THE BOOK ON … RANDY MOSS *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"He's one of the few guys I know of in this league who, when defenses line up, knows what coverage it is. (Cris) Carter caught a whole lot of footballs by telling the quarterback what the coverage was going to be. So to say the guy doesn't know how to run routes and he's not this and he's not that, those things are totally false. I don't know how many guys you know who can line up and tell the quarterback what the coverage is, but Randy is one of them. I don't think his attitude has ever been what people have made it out to be. He's one of those intense competitors that, whether it's marbles or fishing or anything, hates to lose. Which is why he wants the ball all the time. He's also a guy who has kind of a magnetic effect on his teammates. He's always holding the barbecues or saying, 'Let's go here as a group' or 'Let's go watch this high school football game as a group.'"



NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	411.3	1
RUSHING	115.6	13
PASSING	295.7	1
SCORING	589	1
PUNT RETURNS	9.4	11
KICK RETURNS	25.2	4
RED ZONE TD %	69.4	2
TOTAL DEFENSE	288.3	4
AGAINST RUSH	98.3	10
AGAINST PASS	190.1	6
POINTS ALLOWED	274	4
INTERCEPTIONS	19	6t
SACKS	47	2
TURNOVER DIFF.	+16	3

TOP TO BOTTOM: JIM ROGASH / GETTY IMAGES; BOB LEVERONE / SN

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE *(an opponent breaks down the Patriots)*

"It comes down to picking what you want to do against them based on the players that you have. You don't want to put your players in any situation that they can't handle. The Patriots pose a lot of problems. They have tremendous weapons and they've got their running game in gear. The receivers they have all present different kinds of problems. They have deep threats, underneath threats. Of course, the guy pulling the trigger (Tom Brady), as we all know, is very special. It's a challenge.

"The key is hitting him (Brady). Even if he gets the ball out or completes the pass, you need to hit him and disrupt him. The man is a true warrior. He hangs in there no matter how much heat you put on him or how many times you hit him.

"The other thing is your offense has to keep them off the field. Control the clock and keep it from turning into a track meet."

century mark in four of his final six games, recording back-to-back 100-plus-yard efforts to open the playoffs.

He did so by abandoning the backfield salsa dancing that routinely turned three-yard gains into one-yard losses. Once Maroney decided to follow his blocks and hit holes with authority, the results were obvious.

New England at least has a capable backup in Sammy Morris, who missed most of last season after suffering a freak chest injury. Morris is all about squaring his pads and running downhill, and if the Patriots have to turn to him, they shouldn't suffer for it.

When third down arises and the Patriots need either a big reception or someone who can stay in and pick up the blitz for Brady, they have the perfect weapon in Faulk. One of the most underrated players on the team, Faulk is amazingly enough entering his 10th season. **GRADE: B**

Receivers » When it comes to expectations, the Patriots' wideouts are like the first two seasons of "24"—they set the stakes so high, it's going to be almost impossible to produce an encore.

Short of saving the world, they'll have to settle for once again being the NFL's most productive unit.

The pieces are in place with Mr. Inside and Mr. Outside. We'll start with the latter. Moss rewrote the record books after memorably declaring that "The Moss of old is back" during his introductory press conference with the New England media.

Moss will need to be managed a little differently in 2008, however, since he just turned 31 and can't realistically be expected to sprint 50 yards on every snap, which is basically what he did last year before wearing down noticeably in the playoffs.

With hamstrings and groins always an issue for receivers older than 30, Moss will almost certainly be throttled back a bit.

The same does not need to be said for Welker, a Troy Brown-clone who ultimately helped make Brown expendable. Welker broke Brown's franchise record for receptions by catching 112 balls last year. He's tough enough to avoid jams at the line and quick enough to shake every linebacker in the league underneath. He is Brady's money target.

Jabar Gaffney and Chad Jackson will compete for the right to be the No. 3 wideout. **GRADE: A-**

Offensive line » The whole "you're only as good as your last game" thing is working against this group.

The Patriots boasted three Pro Bowlers on their line in 2007, but center Dan Koppen, left guard Logan Mankins and left tackle Matt Light were made to look less than ordinary in the Super Bowl against the Giants' relentless pass rush.

New England, taking a longer view, didn't seek wholesale changes, entrusting the protection of Tom Brady to the same group that has had his back since right tackle Nick Kaczur joined the club in 2005.

The Patriots favor slightly smaller, quicker linemen to behemoths. They like to combo block and run some zone plays in the ground game. One of the keys to the unit's success is familiarity. The aforementioned quartet, along with starting right guard Stephen Neal and top backup Russ Hochstein, have a comfort level that only comes with years of experience together.

Koppen makes the calls, Mankins plays with a nasty streak and Light is effective against all but

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		
QB	Tom Brady	Matt Cassel
FB	Heath Evans	Kyle Eckel
RB	Laurence Maroney	Kevin Faulk
WR	Randy Moss	Jabar Gaffney
WR	Wes Welker	Kelley Washington
TE	Benjamin Watson	Stephen Spach
LT	Matt Light	Wesley Britt
LG	Logan Mankins	Russ Hochstein
C	Dan Koppen	Russ Hochstein
RG	Stephen Neal	Billy Yates
RT	Nick Kaczur	Ryan O'Callaghan
DEFENSE		
LE	Ty Warren	Le Kevin Smith
NT	Vince Wilfork	Mike Wright
RE	Richard Seymour	Jarvis Green
OLB	Mike Vrabel	Pierre Woods
ILB	Tedy Bruschi	Larry Izzo
ILB	Jerod Mayo	Victor Hobson
OLB	Adalius Thomas	Shawn Crable
LCB	Fernando Bryant	Terrence Wheatley
SS	Rodney Harrison	Willie Andrews
FS	James Sanders	Brandon Meriweather
RCB	Ellis Hobbs	Jonathan Wilhite
SPECIALISTS		
K	Stephen Gostkowski	
P	Chris Hanson	
KR	Ellis Hobbs	
PR	Wes Welker	
LS	Lonie Paxton	

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1	Kansas City	SEPT. 7	1:00
WEEK 2	@ New York Jets	SEP. 14	4:15
WEEK 3	Miami	SEP. 21	1:00
WEEK 4	*OPEN DATE*		
WEEK 5	@ San Francisco	OCT. 5	4:15
WEEK 6	@ San Diego	OCT. 12	8:15
WEEK 7	Denver	OCT. 20	8:30
WEEK 8	St. Louis	OCT. 26	1:00
WEEK 9	@ Indianapolis	NOV. 2	8:15
WEEK 10	Buffalo	NOV. 9	1:00
WEEK 11	New York Jets	NOV. 13	8:15
WEEK 12	@ Miami	NOV. 23	1:00
WEEK 13	Pittsburgh	NOV. 30	4:15
WEEK 14	@ Seattle	DEC. 7	8:15
WEEK 15	@ Oakland	DEC. 14	4:15
WEEK 16	Arizona	DEC. 21	1:00
WEEK 17	@ Buffalo	DEC. 28	1:00

SCORE — W / L

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/09	W	38-14	at New York Jets
09/16	W	38-14	San Diego Chargers
09/23	W	38-7	Buffalo Bills
10/01	W	34-13	at Cincinnati Bengals
10/07	W	34-17	Cleveland Browns
10/14	W	48-27	at Dallas Cowboys
10/21	W	49-28	at Miami Dolphins
10/28	W	52-7	Washington Redskins
11/04	W	24-20	at Indianapolis Colts
11/18	W	56-10	at Buffalo Bills
11/25	W	31-28	Philadelphia Eagles
12/03	W	27-24	at Baltimore Ravens
12/09	W	34-13	Pittsburgh Steelers
12/16	W	20-10	New York Jets
12/23	W	28-7	Miami Dolphins
12/29	W	38-35	at New York Giants

WON 16, LOST 0

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Maroney	185	835	4.5	59t	6
Morris	85	384	4.5	49	3
Faulk	62	265	4.3	14	0
Evans	34	121	3.6	11	3
Brady	37	98	2.6	19	2
Eckel	33	90	2.7	14	2
Welker	4	34	8.5	27	0
Cassel	4	12	3.0	15t	1
Stallworth	1	12	12.0	12	0
Watson	1	11	11.0	11	0
Gutierrez	5	-13	-2.6	-1	0
PATRIOTS	**451**	**1849**	**4.1**	**59t**	**17**
OPPONENTS	360	1572	4.4	49	7

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Welker	112	1175	10.5	42	8
Moss	98	1493	15.2	65t	23
Faulk	47	383	8.1	23	1
Stallworth	46	697	15.2	69t	3
Gaffney	36	449	12.5	56t	5
Watson	36	389	10.8	35	6
Brady	9	70	7.8	20	2
Morris	6	35	5.8	18	0
Evans	4	43	10.8	29	0
Maroney	4	116	29.0	43	0
Vrabel	2	3	1.5	2t	2
Eckel	1	6	6.0	6	0
Mankins	1	-9	-9.0	-9	0
Thomas	1	9	9.0	9	0
PATRIOTS	**403**	**4859**	**12.1**	**69t**	**50**
OPPONENTS	314	3381	10.8	73t	23

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Brady	578	398	4806	50	8
Cassel	7	4	38	0	1
Gutierrez	1	1	15	0	0
PATRIOTS	**586**	**403**	**4859**	**50**	**9**
OPPONENTS	526	314	3381	23	19

SACKS — **PATRIOTS 47, OPPONENTS 21**

Vrabel 12.5, Green 6.5, Thomas 6.5, Colvin 4, Warren 4, Seau 3.5, Bruschi 2, Harrison 2, Wilfork 2, Seymour 1.5, Hobbs 1, Wright 0.5

the speediest speed rushers. If there's a concern, it's on the right side, where Neal underwent offseason shoulder surgery and Kaczur has been up and down. **GRADE: A-**

DEFENSE

Defensive coordinator Dean Pees cannot be blamed for the breakdowns that resulted in the winning touchdown in the Super Bowl. He had his defenders in position to make game-clinching plays, but failures to record a sack or an interception on two different plays kept the Giants' drive alive. A Belichick disciple before he even knew the coach—he cut his teeth as a coordinator under Nick Saban at Toledo and Michigan State—Pees runs the Belichick defense to perfection, disguising coverages and rush packages while relying on the versatility of the team's base 3-4 scheme.

Defensive line Set foot in the Patriots' locker room, and they're the first three players you see inside the door—Ty Warren, Richard Seymour, and Vince Wilfork.

They're an imposing sight in street clothes, but even more terrifying on the field, where the trio comprises the best 3-4 front in the league.

The group does it all. Seymour is a five-time Pro Bowler who, when healthy, can dominate a game without making a tackle. Opponents can't run at him and sometimes can't even block him with a double team.

Wilfork made his first Pro Bowl last year, and it was richly deserved. He has surpassed Casey Hampton and Jamal Williams as the premier 3-4 nose tackle in the game. Wilfork is big enough to clog the middle, but agile enough to chase down opposing receivers on swing passes. The Patriots may let him get upfield a little bit more this year.

Then there's Warren, who might just be the best of the bunch. The soft-spoken Texan is a beast on the left side of the line, where his mix of power and strength is too much for most right tackles to handle.

Add starting-caliber lineman Jarvis Green off the bench, and the Pats have an outstanding rotation. **GRADE: A**

Linebackers At the rate the Patriots were going, Clay Matthews was going to get the next call to join their linebacking corps.

OFFSEASON MOVES

ADDITIONS:

WR **Sam Aiken** *(FA/Bills)*, CB **Jason Webster** *(FA/Bills)*, DB **Lewis Sanders** *(FA/Falcons)*, S **Tank Williams** *(FA/Vikings)*, CB **Fernando Bryant** *(FA/Lions)*, LB **Victor Hobson** *(FA/Jets)*, TE **Marcus Pollard** *(FA/Seahawks)*, P **Scott Player** *(FA/Browns)*

SUBTRACTIONS:

OLB **Rosevelt Colvin** *(FA)*, DB **Eugene Wilson** *(FA/Buccaneers)*, CB **Asante Samuel** *(FA/Eagles)*, DT **Rashad Moore** *(FA/Falcons)*, CB **Randall Gay** *(FA/Saints)*, WR **Troy Brown** *(FA)*, TE **Kyle Brady** *(FA)*, CB **Chad Scott** *(FA)*, WR **Donté Stallworth** *(FA/Browns)*, S **Mel Mitchell** *(FA)*

But just when it seemed the Pats were determined to be oldest at one of the most important positions in their 3-4, they finally faced reality and added some serious youth to the unit via the draft.

Rookies Jerod Mayo (first round) and Shawn Crable (third) will be given every opportunity to integrate themselves into a group that could benefit from some fresh legs.

A tackling machine at Tennessee, Mayo will probably start alongside Tedy Bruschi in the middle. Bruschi is a warrior, but he turns 35 before training camp and is likely on borrowed time.

If Mayo can nail down a job inside, that will leave Pro Bowlers Mike Vrabel and Adalius Thomas on the outside, where each plays his best. Vrabel is coming off the best season of his distinguished career, though he appeared to tire down the stretch. Thomas, meanwhile, now has a year under his belt with the Pats and appeared to be playing his best football at the end of the season, particularly in the Super Bowl.

Though veteran Junior Seau hadn't decided on his future at press time, it's likely that he'll return for one more run. This time the Pats should be able to spot him instead of asking him to play full-time, which he basically did last year. **GRADE: B**

Secondary If the Pats have an Achilles' heel, it's in the defensive backfield.

The Patriots lost Asante Samuel in free agency and knew entering the offseason that they wouldn't be able to replace him with anyone comparable. Losing slot man Randall Gay hurt, too.

As things stand now, veteran Fernando Bryant will likely start at

PATRIOTS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1 Andre Tippett *(1982-93)*

After averaging more than a half a sack a game, he still holds New England's career record with 100.

2 Steve Nelson *(1974-87)*

Notched a fitting number of tackles in his 14 years with the Patriots: 1,776.

3 Ted Johnson *(1995-2004)*

Made the most of his 763 career tackles with bone-crushing hits while manning the middle of an often-fearsome defense.

INSIDE THE HEADSET

BILL BELICHICK

There's a reason the word "genius" is attached to Belichick so frequently. He tailors his game plan to the strengths of the opponent, making sure to take those away first. He has won with smashmouth squads led by Corey Dillon and air-it-out teams like last year's record-breakers. Belichick never fears rolling the dice and converts more fourth downs than any coach in the league.

cornerback opposite incumbent Ellis Hobbs. Bryant has been the definition of solid throughout his career, though it's always a red flag when a defense-starved team like the Lions sets you free.

The wild cards in all of this are two of the team's draftees. Second-rounder Terrence Wheatley and fourth-rounder Jonathan Wilhite battled injuries in college and both are undersized, but they're also tough, fast and athletic.

If those two can step in and provide the kind of boost New England received from Samuel and Eugene Wilson when they were rookies in 2003, the Pats will be in business. If they don't, it could be a tough year at corner.

As far as safety goes, Rodney Harrison returns for another go-round. Harrison's contributions extend far beyond what he brings to the field, which is feistiness and edge. He's also a team leader and one of the rocks of the locker room.

The jury is still out on whether James Sanders is anything more than an average free safety or if second-year man Brandon Meriweather can thrive in this system. **GRADE: B-**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Kicker Stephen Gostkowski was plenty busy last year—he set an NFL record for extra points—but the Patriots' touchdown-centric offense may have ultimately hurt him.

Gostkowski was pretty rusty on field goals by the time the postseason rolled around, enough for the coaching staff to pass on a 48-yard field goal attempt in the third quarter of the Super Bowl.

That said, Gostkowski has a huge leg and was fearless as a rookie, so he's got nothing to worry about. The Pats may bring another kicker into training camp to keep him sharp, however.

Chris Hanson will battle free-agent signee Scott Player for punting duties. The left-footed Hanson is an excellent directional punter and gets good hangtime, if not distance. The Patriots are less interested in a big leg than accuracy, however.

The kick return game should have no shortage of options between Maroney, Hobbs and fifth-round pick Matthew Slater, who had three return touchdowns at UCLA last year and was considered the top return man in the draft.

Punt return duties could go to Welker, Faulk or one of the rookie defensive backs.

Long snapper Lonie Paxton signed a one-year contract extension in March and is one of the best in the business. **GRADE: B**

BOTTOM LINE

With an easy schedule and no shortage of motivation, the Patriots should once again be a force in 2008. As long as Brady stays healthy, they're going to be a 12- to 14-win team.

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FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT

STEADY

ROSTER

#	QUARTERBACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
12	Brady, Tom	QB	6-4	225	08/03/1977	8	Michigan
16	Cassel, Matt	QB	6-4	230	05/17/1982	3	USC
7	Gutierrez, Matt	QB	6-4	230	06/09/1984	1	Idaho State

#	OFFENSIVE LINE	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
65	Britt, Wesley	T	6-8	320	11/21/1981	2	Alabama
63	Connolly, Dan	G	6-4	313	09/02/1982	1	Southeast Missouri St.
71	Hochstein, Russ	G	6-4	305	10/07/1977	6	Nebraska
77	Kaczur, Nick	T	6-4	315	07/28/1979	3	Toledo
67	Koppen, Dan	C	6-2	296	09/12/1979	5	Boston College
72	Light, Matt	T	6-4	305	06/23/1978	7	Purdue
70	Mankins, Logan	G	6-4	310	03/10/1982	3	Fresno State
60	Martin, Jimmy	G	6-5	306	10/19/1982	0	Virginia Tech
61	Neal, Stephen	G	6-4	305	10/09/1976	5	Cal State Bakersfield
68	O'Callaghan, Ryan	T	6-7	330	07/19/1983	2	California
66	Paxton, Lonie	C	6-2	260	03/13/1978	8	Sacramento State
74	Yates, Billy	G	6-2	305	04/15/1980	4	Texas A&M

#	RUNNING BACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
38	Eckel, Kyle	RB	5-11	245	12/30/1981	1	Navy
44	Evans, Heath	RB	6-0	250	12/30/1978	7	Auburn
33	Faulk, Kevin	RB	5-8	202	06/05/1976	9	LSU
39	Maroney, Laurence	RB	5-11	220	02/05/1985	2	Minnesota
34	Morris, Sammy	RB	6-0	220	03/23/1977	8	Texas Tech

#	RECEIVERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
89	Aiken, Sam	WR	6-2	215	12/14/1980	5	North Carolina
10	Gaffney, Jabar	WR	6-1	200	12/01/1980	6	Florida
17	Jackson, Chad	WR	6-1	215	03/06/1985	2	Florida
19	Jones, C.J.	WR	5-11	195	09/20/1980	0	Iowa
81	Moss, Randy	WR	6-4	210	02/13/1977	10	Marshall
87	Pollard, Marcus	TE	6-3	255	02/08/1972	13	Bradley
82	Spach, Stephen	TE	6-4	250	07/18/1982	2	Fresno State
86	Thomas, David	TE	6-3	248	07/05/1983	2	Texas
15	Washington, Kelley	WR	6-3	215	08/21/1979	5	Tennessee
84	Watson, Benjamin	TE	6-3	255	12/18/1980	4	Georgia
83	Welker, Wes	WR	5-9	185	05/01/1981	4	Texas Tech

#	DEFENSIVE LINE	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
97	Green, Jarvis	DE	6-3	285	01/12/1979	6	LSU
93	Seymour, Richard	DT	6-6	310	10/06/1979	7	Georgia
95	Smith, Kenny	DT	6-4	303	09/08/1977	3	Alabama
90	Smith, Le Kevin	DT	6-1	308	07/21/1982	2	Nebraska
92	Thomas, Santonio	DT	6-4	305	07/02/1981	1	Miami (FL)
94	Warren, Ty	DT	6-5	300	02/06/1981	5	Texas A&M
75	Wilfork, Vince	DT	6-2	325	11/04/1981	4	Miami (FL)
99	Wright, Mike	DT	6-4	295	03/01/1982	3	Cincinnati

#	DEFENSIVE BACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
23	Andrews, Willie	CB	5-10	190	11/02/1983	2	Baylor
25	Bryant, Fernando	CB	5-11	185	03/26/1977	9	Alabama
37	Harrison, Rodney	S	6-1	220	12/15/1972	14	Western Illinois
27	Hobbs, Ellis	CB	5-9	195	05/16/1983	3	Iowa State
31	Meriweather, Brandon	S	5-11	200	01/14/1984	1	Miami (FL)
35	Richardson, Mike	CB	5-11	190	02/18/1984	0	Notre Dame
36	Sanders, James	S	5-10	210	11/11/1983	3	Fresno State
29	Sanders, Lewis	CB	6-1	210	06/22/1978	7	Maryland
28	Spann, Antwain	CB	6-0	190	02/22/1983	2	Louisiana-Lafayette
41	Ventrone, Raymond	S	5-10	200	10/21/1982	1	Villanova
21	Webster, Jason	CB	5-9	187	09/08/1977	8	Texas A&M
26	Williams, Tank	S	6-3	223	06/30/1980	5	Stanford

#	LINEBACKERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
52	Alexander, Eric	LB	6-2	240	02/08/1982	4	LSU
54	Bruschi, Tedy	LB	6-1	247	06/09/1973	12	Arizona
59	Hobson, Victor	LB	6-0	252	02/03/1980	5	Michigan
53	Izzo, Larry	LB	5-10	228	09/26/1974	11	Rice
96	Thomas, Adalius	LB	6-2	270	08/18/1977	8	Southern Miss
50	Vrabel, Mike	LB	6-4	261	08/14/1975	11	Ohio State
58	Woods, Pierre	LB	6-5	250	01/06/1982	2	Michigan

#	KICKERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
3	Gostkowski, Stephen	K	6-1	210	01/28/1984	2	Memphis
6	Hanson, Chris	P	6-2	202	10/25/1976	8	Marshall
2	Player, Scott	P	6-1	211	12/17/1969	10	Florida State

▶ **BILL BELICHICK,** *Head coach*

Josh McDaniels, off. coord./quarterbacks; **Dean Pees**, def. coord.; **Dante Scarnecchia**, asst. head coach/off. line; **Ivan Fears**, running backs; **Pepper Johnson**, def. line; **Pete Mangurian**, tight ends; **Matt Patricia**, linebackers; **Brad Seely**, special teams; **Bill O'Brien**, wide receivers; **Dom Capers**, special asst./secondary

HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL

NEW YORK JETS

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE

(an opponent breaks down the Jets)

"The (Tony) Richardson signing is huge because they were in a major need at that position (fullback) and now they have a three-time Pro Bowler who will be great in the locker room. ...

"I don't think that there is really anything that scares you on the offensive side of the ball. Laveranues Coles is probably the most accomplished in terms of big plays over the course of his career but isn't someone that you have to prepare for. You just need to rally and tackle since he is most dangerous after the catch. People love to get on Chad Pennington about the arm strength and not pushing the ball down the field, which I think was finally legit last year. I think plays were called to move the football, but he was very cautious in terms of putting the ball in the air. In my opinion, he at times was eager to check the ball down last year, and I think it was because he was feeling the heat a little and knew it was a matter of time before he was replaced. ...

"I am surprised that they don't get more creative on defense. It seemed like too many times they were just rushing three or four and staying in the same front (and) playing basic zone coverages."

Jets refuel on both sides, but it won't be enough to book playoff flight

By J.P. Pelzman, *Bergen (N.J.) Record*

Eric Mangini often talks about how each season is "unique." Nothing carries over from one year to the next. He'd better be right, since there's not much for the Jets to take from their disappointing 4-12 season in 2007.

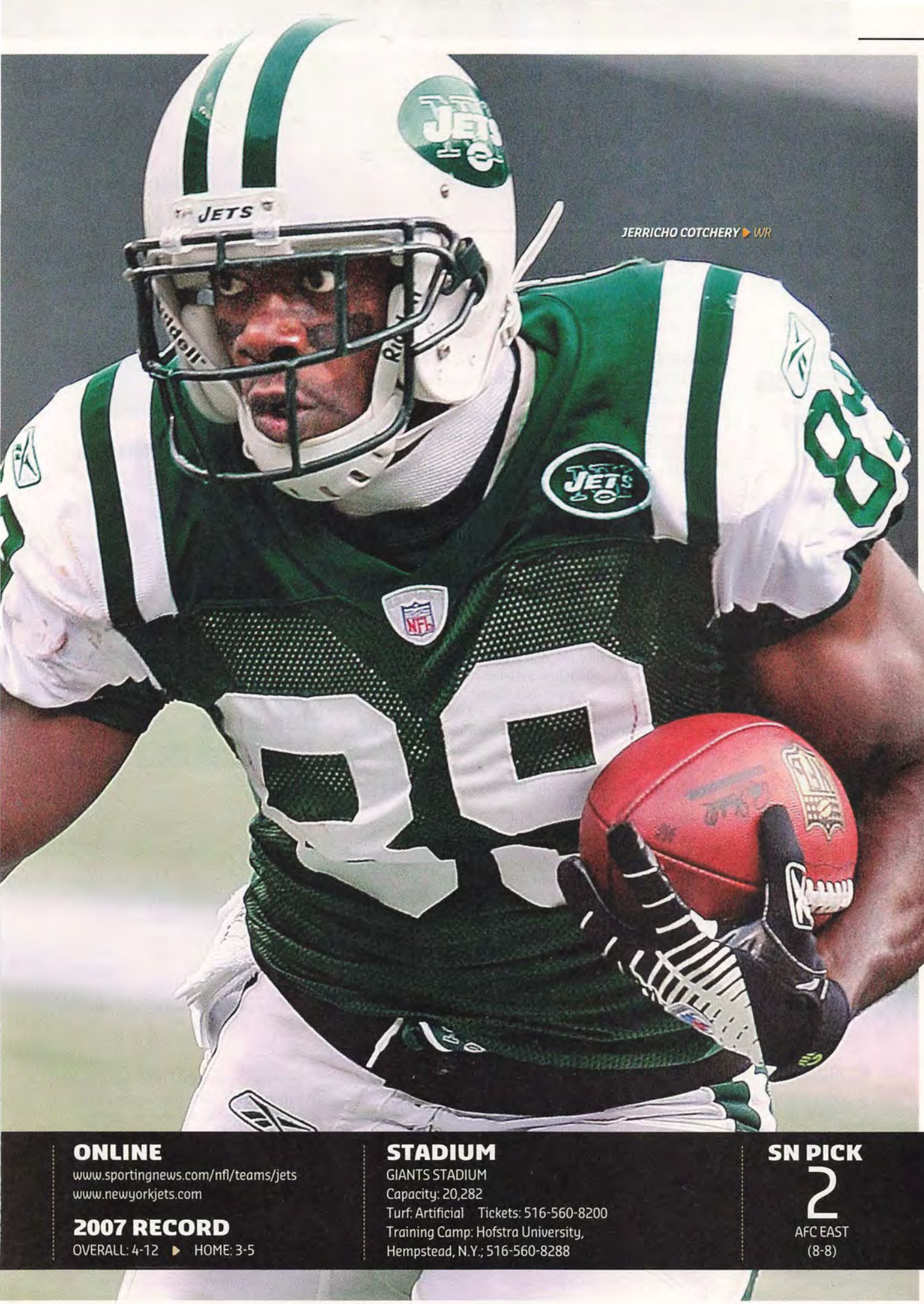
Instead, the team tried to move forward with a flurry of offseason moves. On offense, the Jets signed left guard Alan Faneca and right tackle Damien Woody to plug a leaky line. On defense, they added outside linebacker Calvin Pace and traded for nose tackle Kris Jenkins to shore up a unit that didn't have enough compatible pieces to properly run the 3-4 scheme during Mangini's first two seasons at the helm. Next, the Jets drafted edge-rusher Vernon Gholston with the sixth overall pick, having realized that the only way to challenge division kingpin New England is to consistently pressure quarterback Tom Brady.

BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

CHANSI STUCKEY ▸ WR

Stuckey, a seventh-round pick in 2007, spent all of last season on injured reserve because of a foot injury. But in training camp he showed he could run precise routes and catch almost everything thrown to him. Stuckey could be a very good fit as a slot receiver.

(L TO R): NICK LAHAM, EVAN PINKUS / GETTY IMAGES



ONLINE

www.sportingnews.com/nfl/teams/jets
www.newyorkjets.com

2007 RECORD

OVERALL: 4-12 ▶ HOME: 3-5

STADIUM

GIANTS STADIUM
Capacity: 20,282
Turf: Artificial Tickets: 516-560-8200
Training Camp: Hofstra University,
Hempstead, N.Y.; 516-560-8288

SN PICK

2

AFC EAST
(8-8)

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 @ Miami
SEPT. 7 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 2 New England
SEPT. 14 | 4:15
— SCORE

WEEK 3 @ San Diego
SEPT. 22 | 8:30
— SCORE

WEEK 4 Arizona
SEPT. 28 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 5 *OPEN DATE*

WEEK 6 Cincinnati
OCT. 12 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 7 @ Oakland
OCT. 19 | 4:15
— SCORE

WEEK 8 Kansas City
OCT. 26 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 9 @ Buffalo
NOV. 2 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 10 St. Louis
NOV. 9 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 11 @ New England
NOV. 13 | 8:15
— SCORE

WEEK 12 @ Tennessee
NOV. 23 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 13 Denver
NOV. 30 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 14 @ San Francisco
DEC. 7 | 4:05
— SCORE

WEEK 15 Buffalo
DEC. 14 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 16 @ Seattle
DEC. 21 | 4:05
— SCORE

WEEK 17 Miami
DEC. 28 | 1:00
— SCORE

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

THE BOOK ON ... SHAUN ELLIS *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"He is a big, powerful end. He is strong, a solid technician, and a good effort guy. Most of his pressure comes off of power and not speed. He probably hates the 3-4. Most defensive ends prefer the 4-3 because they only have to control one gap and have a better shot at getting sacks and pressures and making more money. Guys like (New England's Richard) Seymour are fine with playing 3-4 as long as they are compensated for it. But Ellis is plenty strong enough and looks like your typical 3-4 end."

But for the Jets make a run at the AFC East title this year, or even rebound from last season's mess, the new additions must step in and make a difference right away.

OFFENSE

Offensive coordinator Brian Schottenheimer uses multiple formations, pre-snap motion and even some no-huddle to confuse defenses. He also employs gimmicks like direct snaps to running backs. Schottenheimer will continue to call the plays, but it should be interesting to see how much influence new assistant head coach Bill Callahan has on the game plan. Callahan, who will work with the offensive line, ran a traditional West Coast offense when he was the coach at Nebraska.

Quarterbacks Chad Pennington lost his starting job at midseason last year, but neither he nor Kellen Clemens played particularly well, which is why Mangini has declared an open competition entering training camp. Pennington had trouble getting the Jets into the end zone. His arm continued to falter, while his decision-making wasn't near the level of the past. But Clemens, the 2006 second-round pick out of Oregon, led the offense to only nine touchdowns in 88 possessions last season. He has a much stronger arm than Pennington but struggles to make his secondary reads and reacts poorly to pressure from the blind side, making him vulnerable in the pocket.

Fifth-round draft choice Erik Ainge doesn't have a huge arm, but he shares many positive qualities with Pennington, such as his ability to read defenses. He could develop into a starter down the road.

As for this season, Pennington remains the favorite in the quarterback derby, though the organization might grade Clemens on a curve because of his potential. No matter who is behind center, the Jets' offense has to be more productive in the red zone, where they were 31st in touchdown percentage last year. **GRADE: C+**

Running backs Thomas Jones had a rough first season in New York with just 3.6 yards per carry, his lowest number since he averaged 3.4 with Arizona as a sophomore in 2001. A struggling offensive line didn't open many holes for him, but he should have more to work with this season. When he gets to those holes, Jones, who is an above-average NFL back but often a one-cut runner, must make those cuts quicker and more decisively to the second level more often.

The Jets don't believe 5-8 Leon Washington can withstand the rigors of too many carries, and he is looked upon as a change-of-pace guy, especially catching the ball out of the backfield. Free-agent addition Jesse Chatman was a decent third-down back for the Dolphins last year.

5-YEAR WINS TREND

NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	294.7	26
RUSHING	106.3	19
PASSING	188.4	25
SCORING	268	25
PUNT RETURNS	9.2	13
KICK RETURNS	22.9	14
RED ZONE TD %	36.7	31
TOTAL DEFENSE	331.9	18
AGAINST RUSH	134.8	29
AGAINST PASS	197.1	9
POINTS ALLOWED	355	19
INTERCEPTIONS	15	20t
SACKS	29	25
TURNOVER DIFF.	-4	20

The team tried using H-backs instead of conventional fullbacks last season, and it didn't work. So veteran Tony Richardson, who helped open holes for Adrian Peterson in Minnesota last year, was signed as a free agent. Richardson can at least catch the ball, something since-released fullback Darian Barnes had trouble with. **GRADE: B**

Receivers The Jets have two very good starters at this position. The problem is that neither is a game-breaker.

RICH KANE / US PRESSWIRE

Laveranues Coles is a dependable veteran and great at catching the ball in traffic over the middle, but injuries have taken away some of his speed, which was never blazing anyway. He also struggled with concussion and ankle problems last year. Jerricho Cotchery matched a career high with 82 receptions and set a new one with 1,130 yards in 2007. He can produce after the catch, but is not a deep threat.

Brad Smith seems penciled in as the third receiver. The Jets like the versatility of the former Missouri quarterback, but he must improve at making tough catches. Chansi Stuckey, who spent 2007 on injured reserve but has good hands, should compete with 6-4 rookie Marcus Henry for playing time. Tight end Chris Baker caught 72 passes over the last two seasons and has the best hands on the team, but he became embroiled in an offseason contract dispute. That's one reason the Jets traded up to draft Purdue's Dustin Keller, a converted wideout who has some vertical potential at tight end. Free-agent signee Bubba Franks' best years as a receiver are behind him; he was brought in mostly to block. **GRADE: B**

Offensive line » In the first four days of the free-agent singing period, the Jets gave long-term contracts to two veteran linemen, immediately addressing one of their biggest weaknesses in 2007. Faneca, a seven-time Pro Bowler considered by many to be the best left guard in the NFL, signed for $40 million over five years. Converted right tackle Woody, a center and guard for much of his NFL career, got $25.5 million over five years. Faneca fills the void left when disgruntled Pete Kendall was traded to Washington last August, while Woody replaces veteran Anthony Clement, who had a solid 2006 season for the Jets but slumped last year. The Jets need for Woody to stay trim, which is why there are incentive clauses regarding his weight in his contract.

Faneca's leadership will be important, as he will line up between third-year players D'Brickashaw Ferguson and Nick Mangold, both of whom missed Kendall's veteran presence in 2007. Ferguson has yet to develop into the shutdown left tackle the Jets envisioned when they drafted him fourth overall in 2006, while Mangold slipped slightly from his standout rookie season in 2007. Brandon Moore is as steady as they come at right guard. There is very little experience among the reserves. **GRADE: A-**

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		
QB	Chad Pennington	Kellen Clemens
FB	Tony Richardson	
RB	Thomas Jones	Leon Washington
WR	Laveranues Coles	Brad Smith
WR	Jerricho Cotchery	Marcus Henry
TE	Chris Baker	Dustin Keller
LT	D'Brickashaw Ferguson	Robert Turner
LG	Alan Faneca	Jacob Bender
C	Nick Mangold	Damien Woody
RG	Brandon Moore	Will Montgomery
RT	Damien Woody	Wayne Hunter
DEFENSE		
LE	Shaun Ellis	C.J. Mosley
NT	Kris Jenkins	Sione Pouha
RE	Kenyon Coleman	C.J. Mosley
OLB	Calvin Pace	Bryan Thomas
ILB	David Harris	Matt Chatham
ILB	Eric Barton	Brad Kassell
OLB	Vernon Gholston	David Bowens
LCB	David Barrett	Hank Poteat
SS	Kerry Rhodes	Eric Smith
FS	Abram Elam	Artrell Hawkins
RCB	Darrelle Revis	Dwight Lowery
SPECIALISTS		
K	Mike Nugent	
P	Ben Graham	
KR	Leon Washington	
PR	Leon Washington	
LS	James Dearth	

JETS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1. Mo Lewis *(1991-2003)*

Durable outside linebacker who played 13 years and is the Jets' all-time sack leader at the position with 52.5.

2. Larry Grantham *(1960-72)*

Original New York Titan is still tied for third on the Jets' all-time list for interceptions with 24.

3. Greg Buttle *(1976-84)*

Quintessential Penn State linebacker was a hard-hitting tackler and equally adept in coverage.

RICH KANE / US PRESSWIRE

DRAFT REPORT GRADE: C-

The Jets were real gamblers in the first round, grabbing two players who were viewed by many as second- or third-round prospects before their pre-draft workouts. **Vernon Gholston** is a muscular and well-built defender best suited for New York's 3-4 defense. He lacks explosiveness, though, and projects as more of a power rusher who can stuff the run. His consistency remains a question; in 2007, he had two great games and one good one but was otherwise often a non-factor. Athletic TE **Dustin Keller** has very good hands and can make big plays after the catch. However, he lacks traditional bulk for the position and will have to be moved around and utilized like Dallas Clark of the Colts. Cornerback **Dwight Lowery** was a good fourth-round pickup. His smarts, instincts, competitive streak and willingness to get physical fit the Jets' defensive scheme perfectly. Quarterback **Erik Ainge** has all the intangibles to play in the NFL, but he needs to improve his footwork and mechanics in order to throw more accurately and with better zip. Otherwise, he won't become anything more than a backup. **Marcus Henry** is a big, very well-built wide receiver who runs sharp and fluid routes, has excellent hands and does not hesitate to catch passes in traffic. However, he does not possess the quickness, burst or playing speed to make big catches downfield or run away from defenders. Big OT **Nate Garner** is a competitive blocker with all the intangibles the Jets want in their offensive linemen, but he lacks the talent to develop into a starter.

GHOLSTON ▸ DE

2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
1	6	Gholston, Vernon	DE	6-4	264	Ohio State
1	30	Keller, Dustin	TE	6-4	240	Purdue
4	14	Lowery, Dwight	CB	6-1	185	San Jose State
5	27	Ainge, Erik	QB	6-6	225	Tennessee
6	5	Henry, Marcus	WR	6-4	210	Kansas
7	4	Garner, Nate	T	6-6	325	Arkansas

ROSTER

#	QUARTERBACKS	>>	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
11	Clemens, Kellen	QB	6-2	223	06/06/1983	2	Oregon
10	Pennington, Chad	QB	6-3	225	06/26/1976	8	Marshall
5	Ratliff, Brett	QB	6-4	224	08/08/1985	0	Utah

#	OFFENSIVE LINE	>>	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
72	Bender, Jacob	T	6-6	315	04/25/1985	1	Nicholls State
66	Faneca, Alan	G	6-5	307	12/07/1976	10	LSU
60	Ferguson, D'Brickashaw	T	6-6	312	12/10/1983	2	Virginia
78	Hunter, Wayne	T	6-5	303	07/02/1981	3	Hawaii
74	Mangold, Nick	C	6-4	300	01/13/1984	2	Ohio State
	McChesney, Matt	G	6-4	307	11/06/1981	1	Colorado
68	Montgomery, Will	C	6-3	312	02/13/1983	2	Virginia Tech
65	Moore, Brandon	G	6-3	295	06/03/1980	5	Illinois
76	Oldenburg, Clint	T	6-5	300	09/09/1983	1	Colorado State
75	Turner, Robert	T	6-4	308	08/20/1984	1	New Mexico
67	Woody, Damien	G	6-3	325	11/03/1977	9	Boston College

#	RUNNING BACKS	>>	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
22	Chatman, Jesse	RB	5-8	223	09/22/1979	4	Eastern Washington
20	Jones, Thomas	RB	5-10	215	08/19/1978	8	Virginia
49	Richardson, Tony	RB	6-1	238	12/17/1971	13	Auburn
29	Washington, Leon	RB	5-8	202	08/29/1982	2	Florida State

#	RECEIVERS	>>	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
86	Baker, Chris	TE	6-3	258	11/18/1979	6	Michigan State
18	Ball, David	WR	6-1	197	06/06/1984	0	New Hampshire
17	Clowney, David	WR	6-0	188	07/08/1985	0	Virginia Tech
87	Coles, Laveranues	WR	5-11	193	12/29/1977	8	Florida State
89	Cotchery, Jerricho	WR	6-0	207	06/16/1982	4	North Carolina State
19	Davis, Chris	WR	5-10	180	12/01/1983	1	Wake Forest
85	Dearth, James	TE	6-4	270	01/22/1976	8	Tarleton State
88	Franks, Bubba	TE	6-6	265	01/06/1978	8	Miami (FL)
82	Pociask, Jason	TE	6-2	267	02/09/1983	1	Wisconsin
16	Smith, Brad	WR	6-2	210	12/12/1983	2	Missouri
83	Stuckey, Chansi	WR	6-0	185	10/04/1983	0	Clemson
15	Wright, Wallace	WR	6-1	200	02/01/1984	2	North Carolina

#	DEFENSIVE LINE	>>	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
97	Brown, Kareem	DT	6-4	295	01/30/1984	1	Miami (FL)
93	Coleman, Kenyon	DE	6-5	295	04/10/1979	6	UCLA
70	DeVito, Mike	DE	6-3	298	06/10/1984	1	Maine
92	Ellis, Shaun	DE	6-5	285	06/24/1977	8	Tennessee
77	Jenkins, Kris	DT	6-4	335	08/03/1979	7	Maryland
95	Johnson, Thomas	DT	6-2	298	06/24/1981	2	Middle Tennessee
69	Mosley, C.J.	DT	6-2	312	08/06/1983	3	Missouri
91	Pouha, Sione	DT	6-3	325	02/03/1979	2	Utah

#	DEFENSIVE BACKS	>>	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
36	Barrett, David	CB	5-10	195	12/22/1977	8	Arkansas
29	Bing, Darnell	S	6-2	220	09/10/1984	0	USC
30	Coleman, Drew	CB	5-9	175	04/22/1983	2	TCU
27	Elam, Abram	S	6-0	207	10/15/1981	2	Kent State
25	Hawkins, Artrell	S	5-10	195	11/24/1976	9	Cincinnati
21	Miller, Justin	CB	5-10	196	02/14/1984	3	Clemson
31	Poteat, Hank	CB	5-10	195	08/30/1977	8	Pittsburgh
24	Revis, Darrelle	CB	5-11	204	07/14/1985	1	Pittsburgh
25	Rhodes, Kerry	S	6-3	210	08/02/1982	3	Louisville
33	Smith, Eric	S	6-1	209	03/17/1983	2	Michigan State
38	Woolfolk, Andre	CB	6-2	197	01/26/1980	4	Oklahoma

#	LINEBACKERS	>>	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
50	Barton, Eric	LB	6-2	245	09/29/1977	9	Maryland
96	Bowens, David	LB	6-3	265	07/03/1977	9	Western Illinois
58	Chatham, Matt	LB	6-4	250	06/28/1977	8	South Dakota
52	Harris, David	LB	6-2	243	01/21/1984	1	Michigan
55	Kassell, Brad	LB	6-3	242	01/07/1980	6	North Texas
94	Murrell, Marques	LB	6-2	246	03/20/1985	1	Appalachian State
97	Pace, Calvin	LB	6-4	272	10/28/1980	5	Wake Forest
53	Spencer, Cody	LB	6-2	245	06/01/1981	4	North Texas
99	Thomas, Bryan	LB	6-4	266	06/07/1979	6	UAB
57	Trusnik, Jason	LB	6-4	250	06/06/1984	1	Ohio Northern

#	KICKERS	>>	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
7	Graham, Ben	P	6-5	235	11/02/1973	3	None
3	Kapinos, Jeremy	P	6-1	235	08/23/1984	1	Penn State
1	Nugent, Mike	K	5-9	188	03/02/1982	3	Ohio State

▶ **ERIC MANGINI,** *Head coach*

Brian Schottenheimer, off. coord.; **Bob Sutton**, def. coord.; **Kevin O'Dea**, special teams coord.; **Bill Callahan**, asst. head coach/offense; **Bryan Cox**, asst. def. line; **Mike Delvin**, tight ends/asst. off. line; **Jim Herrmann**, linebackers; **Noel Mazzone**, wide receivers; **Jimmy Raye**, running backs; **Jerome Henderson**, def. backs; **Brian Daboll**, quarterbacks; **Dan Quinn**, def. line

DEFENSE

The Jets run a 3-4 scheme very similar to the one used by New England, where Mangini served for a year as defensive coordinator. Mangini remains very hands-on with the defense, although Bob Sutton is entering his third year as the coordinator. The Jets primarily employ zone coverage in the secondary and don't blitz all that much up front, instead opting to use schemes and games to get to the passer.

Defensive line >> Perhaps the Jets' biggest offseason move, literally, came when they traded two draft picks to the Carolina Panthers for the 335-pound Jenkins. The three-time Pro Bowler seems physically suited to be the run-stuffer his new position demands, though he's always played in a 4-3 defense. His contract, like Woody's, has several incentives for keeping his weight down.

Sione Pouha is a solid backup and will be an important part of the rotation. In April, the Jets finally traded incumbent nose tackle Dewayne Robertson, who was ill suited for the 3-4. At left end, Shaun Ellis remains solid; he tied for the team lead with five sacks in 2007. However, it seems the 31-year-old's best days were as a 4-3 end in the Jets' previous system.

The Jets overpaid for right end Kenyon Coleman during the 2006 offseason, but he fits the defense well and is tough against the run. Backup end C.J. Mosley came on strong near the end of the 2007 season and will factor into the rotation again this year. The Jets believe Kareem Brown, a fourth-round pick in 2007 who was released by New England, has potential. **GRADE: B-**

Linebackers >> Outside linebacker Bryan Thomas slumped to 2.5 sacks after recording a career-high 8.5 in 2006 and lost his starting job in December. So the Jets decided to look for help after finishing 25th in the NFL in sacks last year. They signed Pace, who had a breakthrough year for the

LAVERANUES COLES ▶ WR

OFFSEASON MOVES

ADDITIONS:

DT **Kris Jenkins** *(trade/ Panthers)*, G **Alan Faneca** *(FA/ Steelers)*, DE **Calvin Pace** *(FA/ Cardinals)*, C **Damien Woody** *(FA/Lions)*, DB **Andre Woolfolk** *(FA/Titans)*, FB **Tony Richardson** *(FA/Vikings)*, RB **Jesse Chatman** *(FA/Dolphins)*, TE **Bubba Franks** *(FA/Packers)*

SUBTRACTIONS:

G **Adrien Clarke** *(FA)*, WR **Justin McCareins** *(FA/Titans)*, CB **Andre Dyson** *(FA)*, QB **Marques Tuiasosopo** *(FA)*, OL **Wade Smith** *(FA/Chiefs)*, LB **Victor Hobson** *(FA/Patriots)*, S **Erik Coleman** *(FA/Falcons)*, TE **Sean Ryan** *(FA/Dolphins)*, T **Anthony Clement** *(FA)*, TE **Joe Kowalewski** *(FA)*

INSIDE THE HEADSET

ERIC MANGINI

A former defensive coordinator, Mangini doesn't involve himself much with the offensive calls, although he is often hands-on with the in-game defensive calls. He likes onside kicks and tried three of them in the last 2:59 of a loss to Cleveland last season.

(L TO R): TOMASSO DEROSA; HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL

FANTASY SPIN

http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football

COLES

PENNINGTON

CHATMAN

The addition of linemen Alan Faneca and Damien Woody adds to running back Thomas Jones' value. Jones scored just one rushing touchdown in 2007, despite posting his third straight 1,000-yard season.

BUY » Laveranues Coles, WR

SELL » Chad Pennington, QB

SLEEPER » Jesse Chatman, RB

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/09	L	14-38	New England Patriots
09/16	L	13-20	at Baltimore Ravens
09/23	W	31-28	Miami Dolphins
09/30	L	14-17	at Buffalo Bills
10/07	L	24-35	at New York Giants
10/14	L	9-16	Philadelphia Eagles
10/21	L	31-38	at Cincinnati Bengals
10/28	L	3-13	Buffalo Bills
11/04	L	20-23	Washington Redskins
11/18	W	19-16	Pittsburgh Steelers
11/22	L	3-34	at Dallas Cowboys
12/02	W	40-13	at Miami Dolphins
12/09	L	18-24	Cleveland Browns
12/16	L	10-20	at New England Patriots
12/23	L	6-10	at Tennessee Titans
12/30	W	13-10	Kansas City Chiefs

WON 4, LOST 12

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Jones	310	1119	3.6	36	1
Washington	71	353	5.0	49	3
Clemens	27	111	4.1	18	1
Smith	12	45	3.8	11	0
Cotchery	5	38	7.6	16	0
Pennington	20	32	1.6	5	1
Davis	1	3	3.0	3	0
JETS	**446**	**1701**	**3.8**	**49**	**6**
OPPONENTS	517	2156	4.2	32	14

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Cotchery	82	1130	13.8	50	2
Coles	55	646	11.7	57t	6
Baker	41	409	10.0	22	3
Washington	36	213	5.9	18	0
Smith	32	325	10.2	29	2
Jones	28	217	7.8	25	1
McCareins	19	232	12.2	51	0
Wright	6	87	14.5	36	0
Kowalewski	5	18	3.6	6	1
Ryan	3	46	15.3	22	0
Davis	1	3	3.0	3	0
Mangold	1	-3	-3.0	-3	0
Pociask	1	7	7.0	7	0
JETS	**310**	**3330**	**10.7**	**57t**	**15**
OPPONENTS	289	3362	11.6	85t	18

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Pennington	260	179	1765	10	9
Clemens	250	130	1529	5	10
Smith	1	0	0	0	0
Washington	1	1	36	0	0
JETS	**512**	**310**	**3330**	**15**	**19**
OPPONENTS	470	289	3362	18	15

SACKS JETS 29, OPPONENTS 53

Ellis 5, Harris 5, Robertson 4, Bowens 2.5, Mosley 2.5, Thomas 2.5, Barton 2, Hobson 2, Rhodes 2, Coleman 1.5

Cardinals in 2007 with 6.5 sacks. While the Jets are confident Pace will fit their scheme, his career arc is eerily similar to that of Thomas, who received a five-year contract extension late in 2006. Both were first-round draft choices who blossomed in their fifth, and contract, seasons.

The Jets further bolstered the outside spot with Gholston, who had 14 sacks at Ohio State last season. He could beat out Thomas for the starting spot.

The inside seems to be in good shape with David Harris. He tied for the team lead with five sacks as a rookie despite not starting until Week 8, when since-traded Jonathan Vilma was lost for the season with a knee injury. Eric Barton, who will be 31 in September, had a solid 2007 season.

Reserve David Bowens' experience and savvy make him a solid situational player. **GRADE: B-**

Secondary » Darrelle Revis missed the first two preseason games last year because of a contract impasse, yet still lined up as the opening-day starter. Nicknamed "Baby Lockdown" by his teammates, Revis should have no trouble living up to that billing and figures to be a standout for years to come.

The other spot will be determined in camp. Candidates include 2007 starter Hank Poteat, who was re-signed in May as an unrestricted free agent, veteran David Barrett, third-year pro Drew Coleman, 2008 fourth-round draft pick Dwight Lowery and Justin Miller, who is recovering from a severe knee injury suffered in 2007.

Revis' three interceptions were second on the team to the five made by strong safety Kerry Rhodes, who received a five-year contract extension in the offseason for good reason. Rhodes is the top playmaker on the defense and is equally adept in coverage, run support or as an occasional blitzer. Free safety Abram Elam, signed last September after being released by Dallas, stole the job from Erik Coleman (now with Atlanta) because he was more aggressive in both coverage and as a tackler. Elam must learn to channel that aggression to be a more effective player, however. Reserve safety Eric Smith seemed ready for a breakout season in 2007, but was set back by a leg injury in training camp. **GRADE: B+**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Kicker Mike Nugent connected on 29 of his 36 field-goal attempts inside 50 yards last season and also improved on his kickoffs, notching nine touchbacks. But he was only 1-for-4 from 50 yards and beyond and must improve from long distance. Ben Graham finished 18th in the NFL in net average last year, and his performance typically drops during the second half of the season. In fact, Graham was a healthy scratch against Tennessee in the next-to-last game of 2007 and was replaced by rookie free agent Jeremy Kapinos, who likely will challenge Graham again this spring and summer.

Veteran long snapper James Dearth is almost automatic, although he had a bad one against Philadelphia last year that led to a miss from 44 yards by Nugent. Washington took over kickoff returns after Miller's season-ending injury in Week 2 and seemed headed for the Pro Bowl with three touchdown returns in a seven-game span. But he tailed off as opponents began pooching and squibbing their kickoffs. Washington was unremarkable on punt returns, and the Jets may try Revis, who was a standout punt returner in college. New coordinator Kevin O'Dea has big shoes to fill after the resignation of Mike Westhoff for medical reasons. **GRADE: B**

BOTTOM LINE

The Jets addressed most of their pressing needs in the offseason, especially on defense, but it could take time for all those new parts to mesh. The revamped offensive line must come together quickly and allow the Jets to control the ball, because the attack still doesn't have quick-strike potential. Nor does it have a clear leader behind center heading into camp.

Improvement is expected, particularly with a fairly favorable schedule, although the team will have to make four West Coast trips for the first time in its history. The Jets still aren't close to the Patriots' level, but 8-8 seems like a realistic finish. The playoffs are at least a year away.

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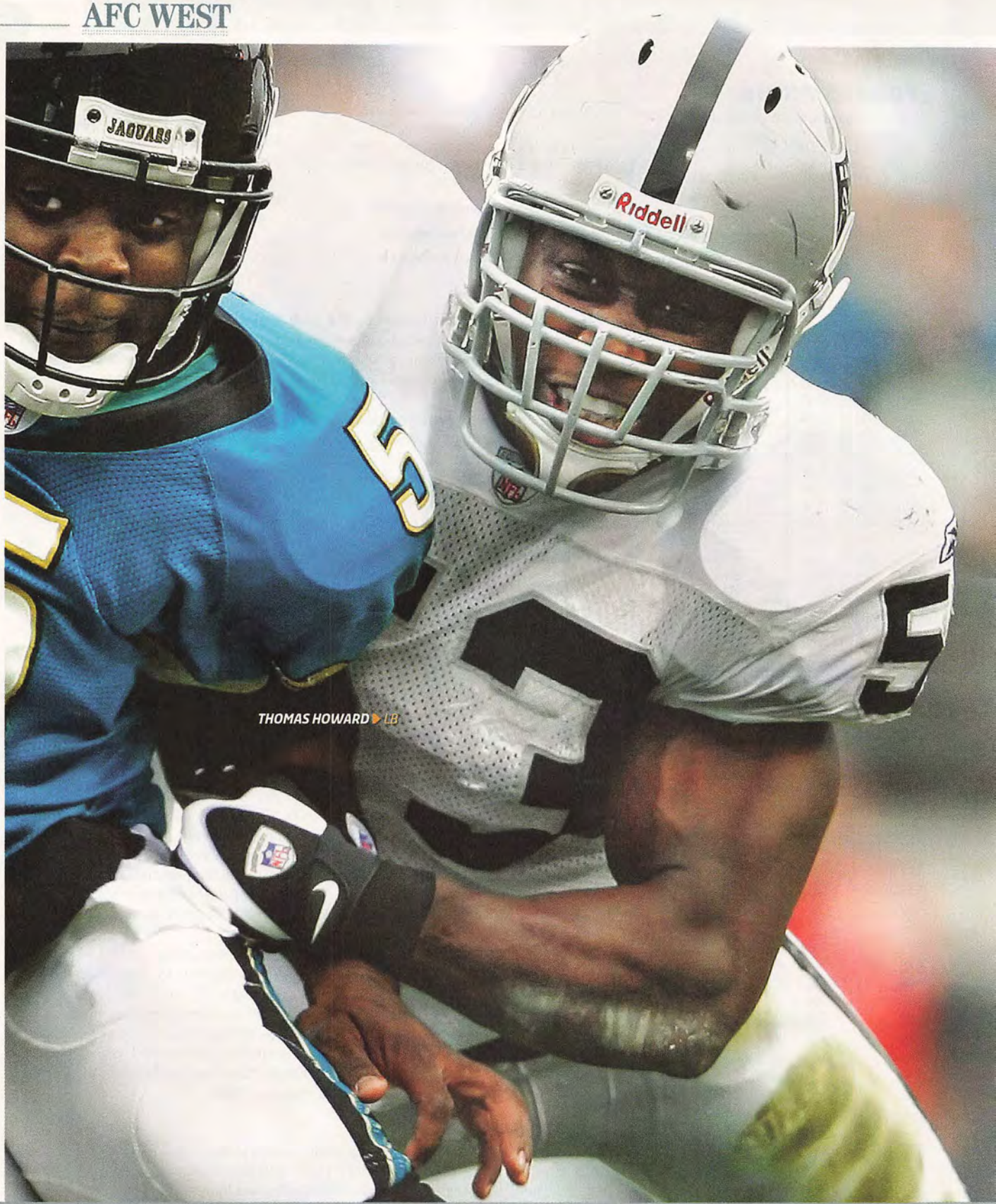
FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT: **UP**

HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL



SN PICK

4

AFC WEST
(3-13)

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2007 RECORD

OVERALL: 4-12 ▶ HOME: 2-6

(L TO R): GRAY QUETTI/CSM; JAY DROWNS / SN; HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL

OAKLAND RAIDERS

Youth, speed key components of Raider reclamation project

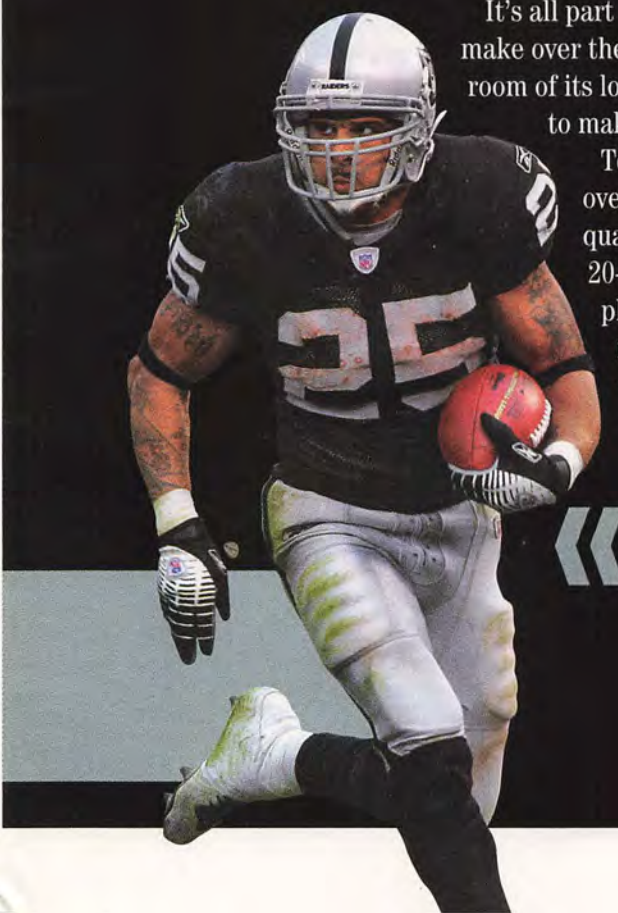
By Steve Corkran, *Contra Costa Times*

The Raiders don't rebuild; they just reload. So goes the thinking of owner Al Davis. No one dares mention the dreaded "R" word in Davis' presence.

But it's difficult to call what the Raiders have done the past five seasons anything other than rebuilding. Just about every player from their 2003 Super Bowl team is gone. Young players man most of the so-called "skill positions." The Raiders no longer take on players who are on the verge of retirement.

It's all part of coach Lane Kiffin's grand plan to make over the Raiders in short order, rid the locker room of its losing mindset and do whatever it takes to make the team relevant again.

To that end, the Raiders have turned over the keys to the offense to 22-year-old quarterback JaMarcus Russell, added 20-year-old running back and all-around playmaker Darren McFadden and infused an underachieving defense with DeAngelo Hall and Gibril Wilson, who both are under the age of 27.



BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

JUSTIN FARGAS ▸ RB

Fargas began the 2007 season as a little-known, seldom-used backup. By season's end, he had supplanted LaMont Jordan as the starter, rushed for more than 1,000 yards and convinced the Raiders to reward him with a long-term, multimillion dollar contract. Yet few people outside of Oakland recognize Fargas as one of the league's most talented running backs. That is about to change.

INSIDE THE HEADSET

LANE KIFFIN

The second-year coach prefers an offense that relies on a strong ground game, a competent passing attack and features a quarterback who is expected to manage the game well. Kiffin is big on keeping the down and distance in his team's favor as often as possible.

OFFSEASON MOVES

ADDITIONS:

S **Gibril Wilson** *(FA/Giants)*, WR **Javon Walker** *(FA/Broncos)*, T **Kwame Harris** *(FA/49ers)*, WR **Drew Carter** *(FA/Panthers)*, DT **William Joseph** *(FA/Giants)*, DB **DeAngelo Hall** *(trade/Falcons)*, **Akbar Gbaja-Biamila** *(FA)*, DE **Kalimba Edwards** *(FA/Lions)*, C **John Wade** *(FA/Buccaneers)*, DE **Greg Spires** *(FA/Buccaneers)*

SUBTRACTIONS:

LB **Chris Clemons** *(FA/Eagles)*, DE **Tyler Brayton** *(FA/Panthers)*, QB **Josh McCown** *(FA/Dolphins)*, WR **Jerry Porter** *(FA/Jaguars)*, T **Barry Sims** *(FA)*, QB **Daunte Culpepper** *(FA)*, WR **Tim Dwight** *(FA)*, C **Jeremy Newberry** *(FA)*, DT **Warren Sapp** *(retired)*, RB **Dominic Rhodes** *(FA/Colts)*, CB **Fabian Washington** *(trade/Ravens)*

This doesn't ensure instant success. The Raiders are still fighting the demons of a 19-61 record over the past five seasons and seeking a reason to believe that things will be different in 2008.

OFFENSE

The Raiders employ a run-oriented offense that relies upon ball control, ball security and field position. Kiffin and offensive coordinator Greg Knapp aren't averse to opening up the offense against teams that excel at stopping the run. However, their preference is to grind out yards as a means of wearing down opposing defenses while keeping their own off the field.

Quarterbacks Entering his second year as a pro, Russell is the projected starter. But the Raiders still aren't sure what he's capable of because of the way his rookie season played out. Russell missed all of training camp and the first week of the regular season because of protracted contract negotiations. As a result, he spent the entire season playing catch-up, trying to make up for all the missed time. He started just one game and didn't get much of an opportunity to experience the growing pains deemed so vital to a quarterback's progression.

Russell arrived early for offseason workouts this year and is working hard to get up to speed in an offense built around his strong arm and playmaking ability. His presence brings about the prospect of the Raiders incorporating the deep pass into their offense for the first time since a little over a decade ago, when Jeff George presided over the offense. Russell is talented enough to make every throw expected of him. However, Kiffin wants his young quarterback to be the kind of player who makes the proper reads on a given play, protects the ball at all costs and repairs broken plays by scrambling. How well Russell develops in his first full season figures to go a long way toward determining Oakland's overall success.

Andrew Walter returns for another season as the backup. He has starting experience and knows the offense better than Russell at this point. **GRADE: C**

Running backs Few teams are as deep or talented at running back as the Raiders. Justin Fargas and LaMont Jordan have both rushed for 1,000 yards or more in a season, with Fargas recording 1,009 last year. The addition of McFadden through the draft gives the Raiders a bevy of options in Kiffin's run-oriented offense. Initially, Oakland intends to use Fargas and McFadden as part of a two-headed attack, with Jordan around in case of injury. Fargas and McFadden are fast enough to break a long run on any given play. McFadden also gives the Raiders the kind of versatile talent who can be a force as a receiver.

Second-year back Michael Bush is healthy enough to play this year; he missed all of 2007 while rehabilitating from a broken right leg sustained in his final collegiate season at Louisville. Bush's size and strength make him the logical choice as the team's short-yardage and goal-line back. Second-year player Oren O'Neal and veteran Justin Griffith figure to split time at fullback, with neither likely to touch the ball very often. This is an area of strength for the Raiders, one they intend to rely on to take pressure off the inexperienced Russell and his receiving corps. **GRADE: A**

Receivers The Raiders threw a ton of money at Javon Walker with the hope that he can bounce back from his third knee surgery and a season in which he caught only 26 passes without a touchdown in five starts. Walker will play opposite Ronald Curry now that former top wideout Jerry Porter is gone. Curry has proven to be a solid player in recent seasons, though much more will now be asked of him.

Oakland also signed free agent Drew Carter and drafted Arman Shields and Chaz Schilens to go with holdovers Johnnie Lee Higgins and Chris McFoy. Walker, Curry and Carter give Russell three dependable targets on

5-YEAR WINS TREND

NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	294.8	25
RUSHING	130.4	6
PASSING	164.4	31
SCORING	283	23
PUNT RETURNS	5.5	31
KICK RETURNS	21.6	25
RED ZONE TD %	60.0	5t
TOTAL DEFENSE	341.6	22
AGAINST RUSH	145.9	31
AGAINST PASS	195.8	8
POINTS ALLOWED	398	26
INTERCEPTIONS	18	10t
SACKS	27	28
TURNOVER DIFF.	-11	28t

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		
QB	JaMarcus Russell	Andrew Walter
FB	Justin Griffith	Oren O'Neal
RB	Justin Fargas	Darren McFadden
WR	Javon Walker	Drew Carter
WR	Ronald Curry	Johnnie Lee Higgins
TE	Zach Miller	John Madsen
LT	Kwame Harris	Mario Henderson
LG	Robert Gallery	Chris Morris
C	John Wade	Jake Grove
RG	Cooper Carlisle	Paul McQuistan
RT	Cornell Green	Mario Henderson
DEFENSE		
LE	Derrick Burgess	Trevor Scott
DT	Tommy Kelly	William Joseph
DT	Gerard Warren	Terdell Sands
RE	Jay Richardson	Kalimba Edwards
OLB	Thomas Howard	Ricky Brown
MLB	Kirk Morrison	Robert Thomas
OLB	Robert Thomas	Sam Williams
CB	Nnamdi Asomugha	Tyvon Branch
SS	Gibril Wilson	Stuart Schweigert
FS	Michael Huff	Hiram Eugene
CB	DeAngelo Hall	Stanford Routt
SPECIALISTS		
K	Sebastian Janikowski	
P	Shane Lechler	
KR	Johnnie Lee Higgins	
PR	Johnnie Lee Higgins	
LS	Jon Condo	

FANTASY SPIN

http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football

FARGAS JANIKOWSKI MILLER

JaMarcus Russell has the physical tools to be a successful NFL quarterback, but not enough experience. He'll be thrown into the fire this season, so temper your expectations.

$ BUY Justin Fargas, RB

SELL Sebastian Janikowski, K

Z SLEEPER Zach Miller, TE

HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL

DRAFT REPORT GRADE ▸ C-

The Raiders drafted a good player in RB **Darren McFadden**, but once again they fell in love with elite speed and overlooked some better prospects who could have helped them at positions of greater need. In any case, McFadden is explosive and has the strength and balance to keep his feet after hard hits and gain yards after contact. He should be able to win the starting job as a rookie. To keep the job in the long run, however, he must learn to protect the ball better and avoid fumbles. The Raiders did not select again until the fourth round, where they grabbed extremely athletic CB **Tyvon Branch**. While Branch needs a lot of work on his technique, he flashes the ball skills to consistently break up passes and has all the tools to develop into a starter. Wide receiver **Arman Shields** would have been drafted higher had he not missed nearly all of the 2007 season with a knee injury. He has the athleticism and hands to make plays after the catch, but his development hinges how well he can recover from the surgery. **Trevor Scott** is a big, athletic defensive end with enticing speed, but he is very raw and needs serious work if he hopes to find the field. Big WR **Chaz Schilens** boasts speed and quickness, but his routes need work. He must catch the ball more consistently to make an impact.

McFADDEN ▸ RB

2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
1	4	McFadden, Darren	RB	6-2	205	Arkansas
4	1	Branch, Tyvon	CB	6-0	199	Connecticut
4	26	Shields, Arman	WR	6-1	194	Richmond
6	3	Scott, Trevor	DE	6-5	258	Buffalo
7	19	Schilens, Chaz	WR	6-4	225	San Diego State

passing downs. The biggest concern with the aforementioned trio is their extensive injury histories. All three have had major surgeries on either a knee or their Achilles tendon. If they hold up, they should be good enough for Oakland to get enough production out of its receivers for a well-balanced offense. If not, defenses will be able to key on the Raiders' running game and make it difficult for them to move the ball with consistency. **GRADE: C**

Offensive line The Raiders cut left tackle Barry Sims and didn't re-sign center Jeremy Newberry. They opted for replacing them with free agents Kwame Harris and John Wade. Left guard Robert Gallery, right guard Cooper Carlisle and right tackle Cornell Green all return as starters. Offensive line coach Tom Cable did a commendable job implementing his zone-blocking scheme last season, and it proved its value in Oakland's resurgent running game. Harris has spent more time on the right side, though he says he feels comfortable on the left side as well. Wade has vast NFL experience and should make Oakland fans quickly forget about Newberry.

There aren't any Pro Bowl-caliber players in this bunch, but they function fine in Cable's system and understand their assignments. In order for the Raiders' running game to again be effective and Russell to have enough time to pass, Harris needs to acclimate himself to left tackle and Green must rebound from a foot injury that cut short his 2007 season. This unit might not strike people as dominant, but it is talented enough to get the job done on a consistent basis. **GRADE: C+**

DEFENSE

Defensive coordinator Rob Ryan likes to keep things simple, for the most part. He

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE *(an opponent breaks down the Raiders)*

"The Raiders made noticeable progress last year under coach (Lane) Kiffin, even if it didn't show so much in terms of wins. They went from a team in obvious disarray to one that at least had some semblance of order. Kiffin implemented an offensive system that plays well to his offensive line's strengths and takes advantage of his talented running backs. They still lack the kind of receiver that strikes fear into an opposing defense. It's puzzling why the defense played so poorly last season. (Defensive coordinator) Rob Ryan should be able to coax more from those players than he got last season.

"Their big question mark is at the most important position: quarterback. We don't know much more about JaMarcus Russell's pro potential right now than we did before last season because of his holdout and lack of playing time. He needs to develop into a leader and consistent playmaker right away for this team to have a chance to make the playoffs. I don't see it happening this season—though I wouldn't be surprised if it does with all the talent they have on their roster."

JED JACOBSOHN / GETTY IMAGES

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 Denver	SEPT. 8	10:15	SCORE
WEEK 2 @ Kansas City	SEPT. 14	1:00	SCORE
WEEK 3 @ Buffalo	SEPT. 21	1:00	SCORE
WEEK 4 San Diego	SEPT. 28	4:05	SCORE
WEEK 5 *OPEN DATE*			
WEEK 6 @ New Orleans	OCT. 12	1:00	SCORE
WEEK 7 New York Jets	OCT. 19	4:15	SCORE
WEEK 8 @ Baltimore	OCT. 26	1:00	SCORE
WEEK 9 Atlanta	NOV. 2	4:15	SCORE
WEEK 10 Carolina	NOV. 9	4:05	SCORE
WEEK 11 @ Miami	NOV. 16	1:00	SCORE
WEEK 12 @ Denver	NOV. 23	4:05	SCORE
WEEK 13 Kansas City	NOV. 30	4:15	SCORE
WEEK 14 @ San Diego	DEC. 4	8:15	SCORE
WEEK 15 New England	DEC. 14	4:15	SCORE
WEEK 16 Houston	DEC. 21	4:05	SCORE
WEEK 17 @ Tampa Bay	DEC. 28	1:00	SCORE

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

asks his cornerbacks to play man-to-man coverage, his linemen to apply pressure on the quarterback and his linebackers and safeties to concentrate on run support. He doesn't like to blitz as often as most coordinators. On occasion, Ryan will switch to a three- or five-man line in an attempt to create confusion for the offense. However, he counts on his base defense to perform well enough so he doesn't have to resort to too many looks.

Defensive line » The Raiders made Tommy Kelly one of the highest-paid defensive linemen in the league and moved him from defensive end to replace retired defensive tackle Warren Sapp. They also signed veteran Kalimba Edwards and drafted sack-happy Trevor Scott in an effort to find a suitable complement to left end Derrick Burgess. And Oakland signed free agent Greg Spires in mid-May to help offset the loss of Sapp and defensive end Chris Clemons. The hope is the 10-year veteran can boost a defense that struggled in 2007 to get consistent pressure on the quarterback and contain the run.

It is imperative for Ryan to find the proper combination of players and get them to perform at a higher level than last season. His defensive scheme is predicated in large part on his linemen getting consistent pressure without much blitzing help. Tackle Gerard Warren and end Jay Richardson figure to be more productive in their second year in Ryan's system.

The Raiders also need massive tackle Terdell Sands to rebound from a disastrous season in which he lost his starting job to Warren after just a few games. Ryan is confident that he can mold this group into a cohesive unit. If not, it figures to be another long year for Oakland's defense. **GRADE: C**

Linebackers » Outside linebacker Thomas Howard and middle linebacker Kirk Morrison are two of the brightest young players in the league. They played at a Pro Bowl-level for long stretches last season and have shown improvement with each year in the league. Howard and Morrison have a nose for the ball and use their impressive speed and instincts to make big plays on a consistent basis.

Strongside linebacker Robert Thomas supplanted Sam Williams as the starter last season and did a commendable job. Even so, this unit needs to perform better against the run than it did last season, when teams ran seemingly at will against the Raiders. Look for Ryan to use Howard and Morrison in blitz packages more often in an attempt to make better use of their superior athleticism and playmaking abilities. Morrison and Howard tend to get overlooked because of the team's overall struggles. However, those who play against the duo know that they are capable of changing the complexion of a game at any time—and they still haven't reached their potential.

Williams is a tall, rangy linebacker who makes plays in bunches but tends

THE BOOK ON ... NNAMDI ASOMUGHA *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"Asomugha is the rare kind of player who can make those around him better because of his ability to excel in man-to-man coverage and help his teammates recognize tendencies. His instincts are matched by few at his position. He has that rare combination of size, speed, instincts and tackling ability, something matched perhaps only by Champ Bailey.

"Asomugha took a while to develop into a front-line player but, once he gained confidence, he elevated his game into the stratosphere. Sometimes, you have to remind yourself just how good he is because teams rarely throw his way. You get the sense that he has the work ethic and character to keep getting better, even though he is at the point in his career where he is going to be among the highest-paid players in the league. ...

"Having someone like Asomugha on your team is a luxury few teams have in that you know you're going to get a standout performance from him every game and you don't have to worry about him getting into any trouble off the field. It's mind-boggling how this guy hasn't been selected to a Pro Bowl yet."

KIRBY LEE / US PRESSWIRE

RAIDERS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1 Matt Millen *(1980-88)*

Millen was a standout and leader on the second and third Super Bowl-winning teams for the Raiders and was a Pro Bowl selection in 1988.

2 Ted Hendricks *(1975-83)*

Elected to the Hall of Fame in 1990, he shined for almost a decade on a defense full of stars and made eight Pro Bowls.

3 Dan Conners *(1964-74)*

He was the kind of player whose style of play personified a defensive unit that earned the nickname "Eleven Angry Men." Conners made three straight Pro Bowls from 1966-68.

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/09	L	21-36	Detroit Lions
09/16	L	20-23	at Denver Broncos
09/23	W	26-24	Cleveland Browns
09/30	W	35-17	at Miami Dolphins
10/14	L	14-28	at San Diego Chargers
10/21	L	10-12	Kansas City Chiefs
10/28	L	9-13	at Tennessee Titans
11/04	L	17-24	Houston Texans
11/11	L	6-17	Chicago Bears
11/18	L	22-29	at Minnesota Vikings
11/25	W	20-17	at Kansas City Chiefs
12/02	W	34-20	Denver Broncos
12/09	L	7-38	at Green Bay Packers
12/16	L	14-21	Indianapolis Colts
12/23	L	11-49	at Jacksonville Jaguars
12/30	L	17-30	San Diego Chargers

WON 4, LOST 12

▸ RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Fargas	222	1009	4.5	48	4
Jordan	144	549	3.8	33	3
Rhodes	75	302	4.0	25	1
McCown	29	143	4.9	24	0
Culpepper	20	40	2.0	9	3
Griffith	7	27	3.9	6	0
Dwight	2	12	6.0	10	0
Russell	5	4	0.8	7	0
Higgins	2	3	1.5	8	0
Curry	1	1	1.0	1	0
Lechler	1	-4	-4.0	-4	0
RAIDERS	**508**	**2086**	**4.1**	**48**	**11**
OPPONENTS	486	2334	4.8	62t	24

▸ RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Curry	55	717	13.0	49	4
Miller	44	444	10.1	28	3
Porter	44	705	16.0	59	6
Jordan	28	247	8.8	27	0
Griffith	26	165	6.3	29	1
Fargas	23	188	8.2	17	0
Rhodes	11	70	6.4	17	0
Madsen	8	102	12.8	39	1
Williams	7	90	12.9	24	0
Dwight	6	98	16.3	28t	2
Higgins	6	47	7.8	16	0
McFoy	1	19	19.0	19	0
O'Neal	1	1	1.0	1	0
RAIDERS	**260**	**2893**	**11.1**	**59**	**17**
OPPONENTS	261	3318	12.7	80t	17

▸ PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
McCown	190	111	1151	10	11
Culpepper	186	108	1331	5	5
Russell	66	36	373	2	4
Walter	8	5	38	0	0
Curry	1	0	0	0	0
RAIDERS	**451**	**260**	**2893**	**17**	**20**
OPPONENTS	439	261	3318	17	18

▸ SACKS — **RAIDERS 27, OPPONENTS 41**

Burgess 8, Clemons 8, Warren 4, Sapp 2, Howard 1, Huff 1, Kelly 1, Morrison 1, Richardson 1

to get lost for spells. He will be used in certain situations and might even work his way back into the starting lineup before season's end. **GRADE: B-**

Secondary » The acquisition of Hall via a trade with the Falcons combined with putting the franchise tag on Nnamdi Asomugha gives the Raiders arguably the most talented cornerback tandem in the league. Good thing, too, because Ryan's philosophy is to use his cornerbacks in man-to-man coverage most of the time and turn loose his safeties in a variety of roles, especially run support. Asomugha has developed into one of the league's elite players over the past two seasons and has room to get even better. Teams shied away from his side of the field most of last season because they found it far easier making hay against Oakland's other cornerbacks.

Hall's presence makes it more likely that teams will be forced to test Asomugha. That plays into the Raiders' hands. Also, Hall won't see as many No. 1 receivers as he did during his four-year stint with the Falcons, so it's conceivable he will be even more productive with the Raiders.

Signing Wilson gives Ryan the flexibility to move Michael Huff from strong safety to free safety, with Wilson taking over the other spot. Huff's build and style of play is better suited to free safety. If nothing else, Wilson will provide an upgrade over Stuart Schweigert and Hiram Eugene, who were both disappointing at the spot last season. Stanford Routt will moves to nickel back to replace Fabian Washington, who was traded to the Ravens. **GRADE: B**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Shane Lechler posted another impressive season and remains Oakland's most consistent performer. His strong punting gives the Raiders an edge in field position time and again. Kicker Sebastian Janikowski showed great leg strength last season, though his field-goal percentage was among the lowest in the league for a third straight year. However, part of that is due to him missing several kicks from beyond 50 yards. Janikowski remains a weapon because of his potential for kicking a 60-yard field goal and the frequency with which he records touchbacks.

With Dominic Rhodes now back in Indianapolis, Higgins will get a shot at both kick and punt returns. However, he needs to improve his decision-making and ball handling. Kick-coverage specialists Jarrod Cooper and Isaiah Ekejiuba are among the best in the league. The Raiders made their re-signings a high priority as a means of solidifying the coverage unit this season. Long snapper Jon Condo did an admirable job replacing Adam Treu last season and provides stability. **GRADE: B-**

BOTTOM LINE

The Raiders play only one team that finished with a winning record or made the playoffs last season in their first 12 games this year. Davis made a series of bold, expensive moves designed to jolt the Raiders from their five-season funk. The dynamic McFadden joins Russell on offense. Add it all up and things are seemingly rosy. However, there are just too many question marks to think Oakland can make the leap from 4-12 to playoff contender in one season. This team would do well to win eight games and show continued progress in its rebuilding process.

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FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT

STEADY

ROSTER

#	QUARTERBACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
7	Otis, Jeff	QB	6-1	210	01/30/1983	0	Columbia
2	Russell, JaMarcus	QB	6-6	255	08/09/1985	1	LSU
16	Walter, Andrew	QB	6-6	230	05/11/1982	2	Arizona State

#	OFFENSIVE LINE	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
70	Boone, Jesse	C	6-5	305	01/28/1982	0	Utah
66	Carlisle, Cooper	G	6-5	295	08/11/1977	8	Florida
76	Gallery, Robert	T	6-7	325	07/26/1980	4	Iowa
74	Green, Cornell	T	6-6	315	08/25/1976	5	UCF
64	Grove, Jake	C	6-4	300	01/22/1980	4	Virginia Tech
77	Harris, Kwame	T	6-7	322	03/15/1982	5	Stanford
75	Henderson, Mario	T	6-7	308	10/29/1984	0	Florida State
79	McQuistan, Paul	G	6-6	315	04/30/1983	2	Weber State
51	Morris, Chris	C	6-4	305	02/02/1983	2	Michigan State
78	Palmer, Jonathan	T	6-4	336	12/03/1983	0	Auburn
76	Wade, John	C	6-5	299	01/25/1975	10	Marshall
72	Wand, Seth	T	6-7	327	08/06/1979	4	Northwest Missouri St.
63	Wilson, Mark	T	6-6	318	11/11/1980	1	California

#	RUNNING BACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
29	Bush, Michael	RB	6-2	247	06/16/1984	0	Louisville
38	Echemandu, Adimchinobi	RB	5-10	226	11/20/1980	4	California
25	Fargas, Justin	RB	6-1	220	01/25/1980	5	USC
36	Griffith, Justin	RB	5-11	232	07/21/1980	5	Mississippi State
34	Jordan, LaMont	RB	5-10	230	11/11/1978	7	Maryland
46	O'Neal, Oren	RB	5-11	248	09/08/1983	1	Arkansas State

#	RECEIVERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
83	Buchanon, Will	WR	6-3	191	04/05/1983	1	USC
18	Carter, Drew	WR	6-3	200	09/05/1981	3	Ohio State
89	Curry, Ronald	WR	6-2	210	05/28/1979	6	North Carolina
15	Higgins, Johnnie Lee	WR	5-11	188	09/08/1983	1	UTEP
10	Holland, Jonathan	WR	6-0	195	02/18/1985	0	Louisiana Tech
13	James, Drisan	WR	5-11	185	01/01/1985	0	Boise State
85	Madsen, John	TE	6-5	240	05/09/1983	2	Utah
14	McFoy, Chris	WR	6-1	200	08/14/1983	1	USC
80	Miller, Zach	TE	6-5	255	12/11/1985	1	Arizona State
86	Stewart, Tony	TE	6-5	260	08/09/1979	7	Penn State
87	Wakefield, Fred	TE	6-7	319	09/17/1978	5	Illinois
17	Walker, Javon	WR	6-3	215	10/14/1978	6	Florida State
19	Watkins, Todd	WR	6-2	191	06/22/1983	0	Brigham Young

#	DEFENSIVE LINE	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
56	Burgess, Derrick	DE	6-2	260	08/12/1978	6	Mississippi
59	Edwards, Kalimba	DE	6-6	265	12/26/1979	6	South Carolina
96	Joseph, William	DT	6-5	308	09/03/1979	4	Miami (FL)
93	Kelly, Tommy	DT	6-6	300	12/27/1980	4	Mississippi State
98	Richardson, Jay	DE	6-6	280	01/27/1984	1	Ohio State
90	Sands, Terdell	DT	6-7	335	10/31/1979	5	Chattanooga
95	Shaw, Josh	DT	6-2	290	09/07/1979	3	Michigan State
94	Spires, Greg	DE	6-1	265	08/12/1974	11	Florida State
61	Warren, Gerard	DT	6-4	330	07/25/1978	7	Florida

#	DEFENSIVE BACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
21	Asomugha, Nnamdi	CB	6-2	210	07/06/1981	5	California
27	Baker, Rashad	S	5-10	198	02/22/1982	4	Tennessee
35	Bowie, John	CB	5-11	190	05/11/1984	1	Cincinnati
40	Cooper, Jarrod	S	6-1	215	03/31/1978	7	Kansas State
31	Eugene, Hiram	S	6-2	200	11/24/1980	1	Louisiana Tech
23	Hall, DeAngelo	CB	5-10	197	11/19/1983	4	Virginia Tech
24	Huff, Michael	S	6-1	205	03/06/1983	2	Texas
37	Johnson, Chris	CB	6-1	198	09/25/1979	2	Louisville
26	Routt, Stanford	CB	6-1	195	07/26/1983	3	Houston
30	Schweigert, Stuart	S	6-1	210	06/21/1981	4	Purdue
32	Waddell, Michael	CB	5-10	180	01/09/1981	2	North Carolina
28	Wilson, Gibril	S	6-0	209	11/12/1981	4	Tennessee

#	LINEBACKERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
47	Alston, Jon	LB	6-0	224	06/04/1983	2	Stanford
57	Brown, Ricky	LB	6-2	235	12/27/1983	2	Boston College
59	Condo, Jon	LB	6-3	250	08/26/1981	2	Maryland
50	Ekejiuba, Isaiah	LB	6-4	240	10/05/1981	3	Virginia
99	Gbaja-Biamila, Akbar	LB	6-5	263	06/06/1979	4	San Diego State
44	Hartwell, Edgerton	LB	6-1	240	05/27/1978	7	Western Illinois
53	Howard, Thomas	LB	6-3	240	07/14/1983	2	UTEP
52	Morrison, Kirk	LB	6-2	240	02/19/1982	3	San Diego State
55	Thomas, Robert	LB	6-0	233	07/17/1980	6	UCLA
54	Williams, Sam	LB	6-5	260	07/28/1980	4	Fresno State

#	KICKERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
11	Janikowski, Sebastian	K	6-2	250	03/02/1978	8	Florida State
9	Lechler, Shane	P	6-2	225	08/07/1976	8	Texas A&M

▶ **LANE KIFFIN,** *Head coach*

Greg Knapp, off. coord.; **Rob Ryan**, def. coord.; **Willie Brown**, def. backs; **Tom Cable**, off. line; **James Cregg**, asst. off. line; **John DeFilippo**, quarterbacks; **Randy Hanson**, asst. def. backs; **Don Johnson**, asst. def. line; **James Lofton**, wide receivers; **Don Martindale**, linebackers; **Keith Millard**, def. line; **Darren Perry**, def. backs; **Tom Rathman**, running backs; **Brian Schneider**, special teams coord.; **Kelly Skipper**, tight ends

PITTSBURGH STEELERS

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE

(an opponent breaks down the Steelers)

"The Steelers are still considered the team to beat in the division for two reasons: quarterback Ben Roethlisberger and their experience at winning. Roethlisberger's ability to make plays is their biggest asset. His escapability in the pocket and ability to make throws on the run place a lot of stress on opposing defenses. If there is a problem area, it's the offensive line, which has been sporadic at times. Too many times Roethlisberger will leave the pocket early instead of waiting for his receivers to come open."

After impressive debut, Tomlin gets no help from schedule in second act

By Gerry Dulac, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

When Mike Tomlin took the reins from Bill Cowher last season, he said he was taking over a playoff team with the talent and desire to return to the postseason. He said he had a marquee quarterback in Ben Roethlisberger who could put the disasters and mishaps of 2006 behind him and return to the form he had displayed in his first two seasons.

As it turned out, the rookie head coach was right.

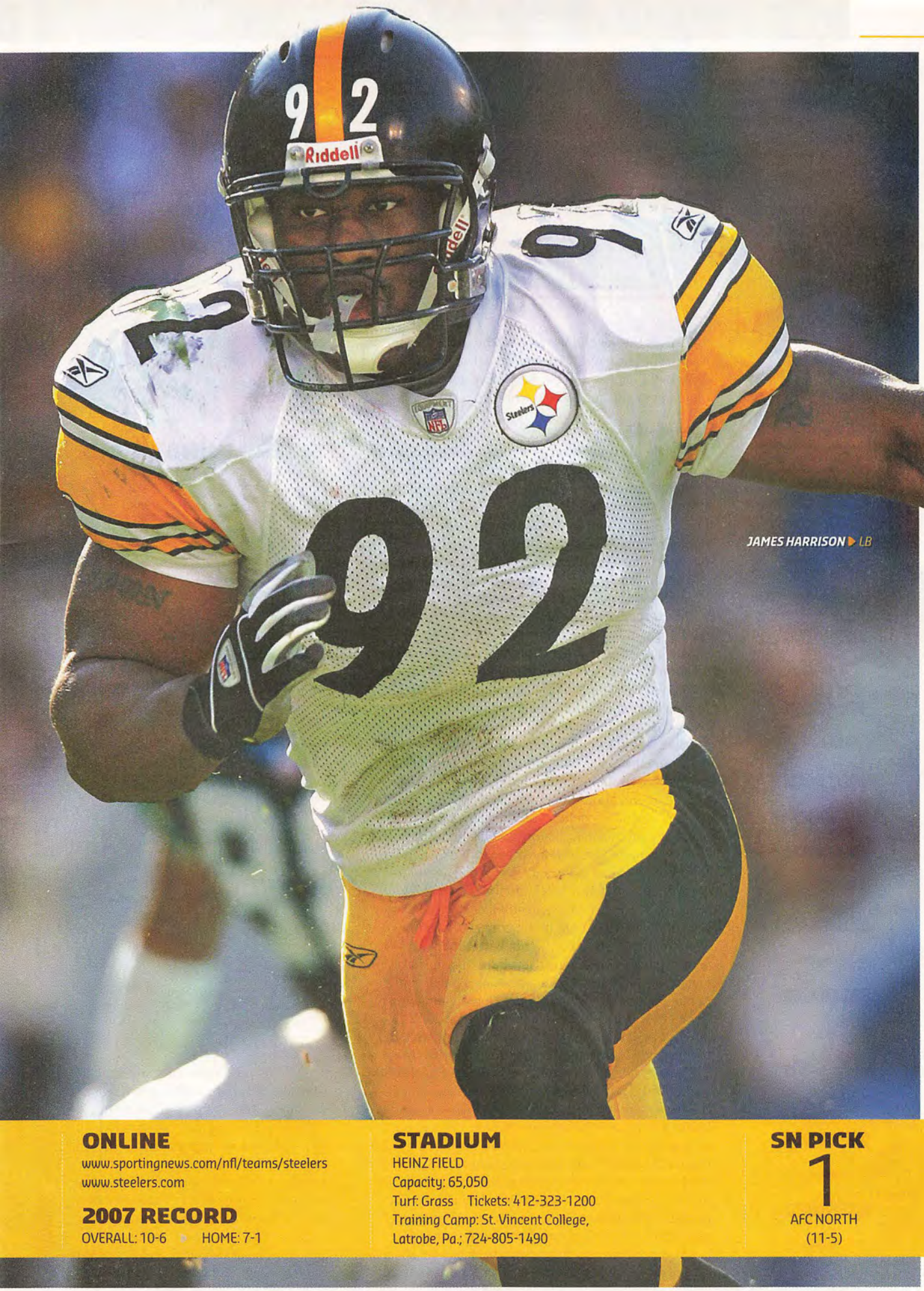
Tomlin also said that he would run Willie Parker, his Pro Bowl running back, "until the wheels came off," and one of them then did—in the 15th game of the regular season, when Parker, the NFL's leading rusher at the time, fractured his fibula.

Tomlin enters his second season much the same as he did his first—confident in his ability, trusting of his players and eager for the challenge, even though the Steelers have the toughest schedule in the league. But he's not taking anything for granted.

BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

LaMARR WOODLEY ▶ OLB

A second-round draft choice last year, Woodley will replace Clark Haggans at left outside linebacker and team with Pro Bowler James Harrison to give the Steelers their best pass-rushing tandem since Jason Gildon and Joey Porter. Woodley, a converted defensive end, has the strength to bull rush, along with the quickness and technique to beat tackles to the outside.



ONLINE

www.sportingnews.com/nfl/teams/steelers
www.steelers.com

2007 RECORD

OVERALL: 10-6 ▶ HOME: 7-1

STADIUM

HEINZ FIELD
Capacity: 65,050
Turf: Grass Tickets: 412-323-1200
Training Camp: St. Vincent College,
Latrobe, Pa.; 724-805-1490

SN PICK

1

AFC NORTH
(11-5)

OPPOSITE: SCOTT BOEHM / GETTY IMAGES; BOB LEVERONE / SN

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 Houston
SEPT. 7 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 2 @ Cleveland
SEPT. 14 | 8:15
— SCORE

WEEK 3 @ Philadelphia
SEPT. 21 | 4:15
— SCORE

WEEK 4 Baltimore
SEPT. 29 | 8:30
— SCORE

WEEK 5 @ Jacksonville
OCT. 5 | 8:15
— SCORE

WEEK 7 *OPEN DATE*

WEEK 7 @ Cincinnati
OCT. 19 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 8 New York Giants
OCT. 26 | 4:15
— SCORE

WEEK 9 @ Washington
NOV. 3 | 8:30
— SCORE

WEEK 10 Indianapolis
NOV. 9 | 4:15
— SCORE

WEEK 11 San Diego
NOV. 16 | 4:15
— SCORE

WEEK 12 Cincinnati
NOV. 20 | 8:15
— SCORE

WEEK 13 @ New England
NOV. 30 | 4:15
— SCORE

WEEK 14 Dallas
DEC. 7 | 4:15
— SCORE

WEEK 15 @ Baltimore
DEC. 14 | 1:00
— SCORE

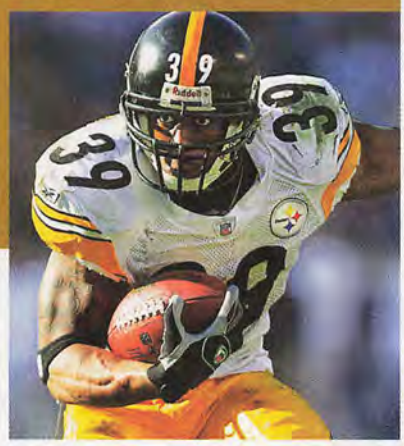
WEEK 16 @ Tennessee
DEC. 21 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 17 Cleveland
DEC. 28 | 1:00
— SCORE

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

THE BOOK ON ... WILLIE PARKER *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"What makes Willie Parker so difficult to contain is the combination of speed and power he brings to their offense. He is not very big (5-10, 209 pounds), but he is powerfully built and not afraid to hit a hole inside the tackles. Because he accelerates so quickly, he generates a lot of power and can explode into a player—in effect, running like a much bigger back than he really is. But what makes him so dangerous is his speed, his ability to get to the edge or break an inside run to the outside. Parker does not have a lot a wiggle in his hips, so he's not a guy who's going to fake you out of your shoes. He's a long strider who's going to flat-out run past you—or try to run over you. That speed is why he has become a dangerous home-run threat."



"This is the second lap around the track for me, if you will," he says. "That being said, every lap is different. I expect it to be. And we've got to roll up our sleeves and get back to work."

OFFENSE

Despite his reputation as a pass-oriented coordinator, Bruce Arians relied on the run last season, though he often did so out of one-back or even empty-set formations. However, Arians believes in throwing deep four to five times a game and isn't afraid to employ multiple formations, including three tight ends. He also likes to give his quarterback control of the offense, letting him audible and change protections at the line of scrimmage.

Quarterbacks The good news is that Roethlisberger is coming off his best season, at least statistically, suggesting that his poor 2006 was nothing but an anomaly. The bad news is he has been sacked a combined 93 times the past two seasons and might have a short shelf life if that trend continues.

Cowher said during the 2005 season that the Steelers would go only as far as Roethlisberger takes them, and that's still the case. After a disappointing campaign two years ago in which he threw a league-high 23 interceptions, Roethlisberger rebounded with a team-record 32 touchdowns, the highest passer rating (104.1) in franchise history and his first Pro Bowl.

He was more involved in Arians' offense, helping to formulate game plans and free to call audibles—something he rarely, if ever, did his first three seasons. The coaches would still like Roethlisberger to become more patient in the pocket, even though he might make plays on the run better than any quarterback in the league. His ability to improvise can be a good thing, but he sometimes bails from the pocket before his receivers have time to come open.

Veteran Charlie Batch is one of the best No. 2 quarterbacks in the league because he is smart and mobile and still has good arm velocity. **GRADE: A**

Running backs Parker, who was leading the league with 1,316 rushing yards when he sustained the season-ending injury against the Rams, no longer has to worry about being a workhorse. The decision to draft Rashard Mendenhall (No. 23 overall) gives the team a 224-pound back who can pound out the tough yards inside and has the speed and cutback ability to make big plays on the outside. Mendenhall was not brought in to replace Parker, a two-time Pro Bowler. Instead, his role will be to complement Parker and possibly see time as a third-down back to take advantage of his receiving ability—at least for this season.

5-YEAR WINS TREND

NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	327.4	17
RUSHING	135.5	3
PASSING	191.9	22
SCORING	393	9t
PUNT RETURNS	6.1	30
KICK RETURNS	22.0	21
RED ZONE TD %	58.2	7
TOTAL DEFENSE	266.4	1
AGAINST RUSH	89.9	3
AGAINST PASS	176.5	3
POINTS ALLOWED	269	2
INTERCEPTIONS	11	30t
SACKS	36	13t
TURNOVER DIFF.	+3	12

There is little concern about Parker's ability to return to full health from his injury. He took part in the team's offseason training program and is expected to be ready for camp. The arrival of Mendenhall, coupled with the decision to sign Mewelde Moore from the Vikings in free agency, will probably mean the end for veteran Najeh Davenport, a 247-pound back who actually runs better in the open field than he does in short-yardage situations. It also means

BOB LEVERONE / SN

less of an opportunity for Gary Russell, a rookie free agent last season who impressed the coaches with his running ability. **GRADE: A**

Receivers » Arians was looking for candidates to fill the fourth receiver spot when veteran Cedrick Wilson was released for off-field issues. However, Arians didn't think he would end up with rookie Limas Sweed. The addition of Sweed, the team's second-round draft choice from Texas, strengthens a unit that already includes four-time Pro Bowler Hines Ward, who is entering his 11th season, and big-play threat Santonio Holmes. Not only is Sweed (6-5, 219 pounds) the big target that Roethlisberger has desired, but he can run, jump and is physically strong. Sweed will be used at split end and afford Arians the opportunity to use more four-receiver sets. Ward led the team with 71 catches last year and remains one of the best all-around receivers in the league, even though he is 32. But Holmes, who averaged 18.1 yards per catch and caught eight touchdowns in 2007, is the receiver the team relies on to make big plays. He runs good routes, has good hands and is fast enough to beat defenders down the field.

Nate Washington, the team's fastest and most athletic receiver, became more consistent last season, eliminating the drops that plagued him each of his first two campaigns. He caught only 29 passes but averaged 15.5 yards and scored five touchdowns. Washington will line up in the slot in third-down situations.

Heath Miller has developed into one of the best pure tight ends in the game. There's little he can't do. Miller is a devastating blocker in the run game and can get open, catch passes and run after the catch. He's Roethlisberger's most dependable target in the red zone. **GRADE: B**

Offensive line » It's hard to imagine how a team among the top rushing units in the league over the past four years can field an underachieving offensive line. But that is the case with the Steelers, who now have the ignominious chore of trying to improve without their best lineman—seven-time Pro Bowl guard Alan Faneca, who signed with the Jets in free agency. Faneca was the main cog in the team's signature running plays, particularly their Counter Power and Counter Lead, because they relied on him to pull from the left side. The Steelers do not have that type of player anymore. Right guard Kendall Simmons, who has started 76 games in six years, is mobile enough to get into the second tier. But he lacks Faneca's toughness. Chris Kemoeatu, a 344-pound mauler, is tough and nasty like Faneca, but he does not run well.

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

	OFFENSE	
QB	Ben Roethlisberger	Charlie Batch
FB	Carey Davis	Mewelde Moore
RB	Willie Parker	Rashard Mendenhall
WR	Hines Ward	Nate Washington
WR	Santonio Holmes	Limas Sweed
TE	Heath Miller	Matt Spaeth
LT	Marvel Smith	Trai Essex
LG	Chris Kemoeatu	Sean Mahan
C	Justin Hartwig	Darnell Stapleton
RG	Kendall Simmons	Sean Mahan
RT	Willie Colon	Max Starks

	DEFENSE	
LT	Aaron Smith	Travis Kirschke
NT	Casey Hampton	Chris Hoke
RE	Brett Keisel	Ryan McBean
LOLB	LaMarr Woodley	Arnold Harrison
ILB	James Farrior	Keyaron Fox
ILB	Lawrence Timmons	Larry Foote
ROLB	James Harrison	Bruce Davis
CB	Ike Taylor	William Gay
CB	Deshea Townsend	Bryant McFadden
FS	Ryan Clark	Ryan Mundy
SS	Troy Polamalu	Anthony Smith

	SPECIALISTS
K	Jeff Reed
P	Daniel Sepulveda
KR	Mewelde Moore
PR	Willie Reid
LS	Greg Warren

STEELERS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1 Jack Ham *(1971-82)*

Almost flawless, Ham was a first-team All-Pro six straight seasons (1974-79) and was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1988.

2 Jack Lambert *(1974-84)*

What he was missing in front teeth (four), Lambert made up for in Super Bowl wins. Elected to the Hall of Fame in 1990, he made nine straight Pro Bowls playing behind the Steel Curtain.

3 Greg Lloyd *(1988-97)*

A sixth-round draft pick out of tiny Fort Valley State, Lloyd was practically unstoppable from 1993 to 1995, when he earned three straight first-team All-Pro selections.

MICHAEL FABUS / GETTY IMAGES

» DRAFT REPORT GRADE ▶ C+

As usual, the Steelers grabbed a very good player in the first round who upgrades them at his position and brings the tough, hard-nosed style they want across the roster. Well-built RB **Rashard Mendenhall** has the quick burst and speed to take advantage of his natural instincts and make big plays. He consistently gains yards after contact and is a strong and punishing runner. Mendenhall must do a better job protecting the ball, however. **Limas Sweed** is a big, athletic wideout with the talent to develop into a very good starter. He needs to focus more consistently to avoid dropping easy passes, as well as play with greater aggression. Pittsburgh gambled by taking DE/LB **Bruce Davis** in the third round. He meshes well with the team's defensive scheme and has the athleticism to become a good starter, but his passion and technique have been inconsistent. The team's fourth- and fifth-round gambles have a better shot at paying off. Offensive tackle **Tony Hills** could have been a first-rounder if he hadn't suffered a broken leg late last season. He has the size, strength and athleticism to develop into a starter. **Dennis Dixon** was a Heisman hopeful as Oregon's QB until he blew out his knee, which caused his stock to fall. He could develop into a "slash" QB/WR/RB over time. Hard-nosed LB **Mike Humpal** fits well with Pittsburgh's 3-4 defense and will likely contribute as a backup and on special teams. **Ryan Mundy** will also upgrade the special teams, though his potential at safety appears limited.

» 2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
1	23	Mendenhall, Rashard	RB	5-11	224	Illinois
2	22	Sweed, Limas	WR	6-5	219	Texas
3	25	Davis, Bruce	DE	6-3	229	UCLA
4	31	Hills, Tony	T	6-6	305	Texas
5	21	Dixon, Dennis	QB	6-4	205	Oregon
6	22	Humpal, Mike	LB	6-3	244	Iowa
6	28	Mundy, Ryan	S	6-1	215	West Virginia

ROSTER

#	QUARTERBACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
16	Batch, Charlie	QB	6-2	216	12/05/1974	8	Eastern Michigan
7	Roethlisberger, Ben	QB	6-5	241	03/02/1982	4	Miami (OH)
5	Zabransky, Jared	QB	6-2	203	12/04/1983	0	Boise State

#	OFFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
69	Capizzi, Jason	T	6-9	315	06/19/1985	0	Indiana (PA)
74	Colon, Willie	T	6-3	315	04/09/1983	2	Hofstra
79	Essex, Trai	T	6-4	324	12/05/1982	3	Northwestern
62	Hartwig, Justin	C	6-4	312	11/21/1978	6	Kansas
68	Kemoeatu, Chris	G	6-3	344	01/04/1983	2	Utah
67	Lentz, Matt	T	6-6	320	11/19/1982	0	Michigan
61	Mahan, Sean	C	6-3	301	05/28/1980	5	Notre Dame
65	Parquet, Jeremy	T	6-6	321	04/11/1982	0	Southern Miss
73	Simmons, Kendall	G	6-3	315	03/11/1979	5	Auburn
77	Smith, Marvel	T	6-5	321	08/06/1978	8	Arizona State
72	Stapleton, Darnell	C	6-3	285	09/21/1985	0	Rutgers
78	Starks, Max	T	6-8	337	01/10/1982	4	Florida
60	Warren, Greg	C	6-3	252	10/18/1981	3	North Carolina

#	RUNNING BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
44	Davenport, Najeh	RB	6-1	247	02/08/1979	6	Miami (FL)
38	Davis, Carey	RB	5-10	225	03/27/1981	2	Illinois
42	Latsko, Billy	RB	5-10	233	02/16/1984	0	Florida
21	Moore, Mewelde	RB	5-11	209	07/24/1982	4	Tulane
39	Parker, Willie	RB	5-10	209	11/11/1980	4	North Carolina
33	Russell, Gary	RB	5-11	215	09/08/1986	1	Minnesota
28	Vincent, Justin	RB	5-10	219	01/25/1983	0	LSU

#	RECEIVERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
81	Baker, Dallas	WR	6-3	206	11/10/1982	0	Florida
11	Bloom, Jeremy	WR	5-9	180	04/02/1982	0	Colorado
48	Boyd, Cody	TE	6-8	264	10/22/1983	0	Washington State
88	Dekker, Jonathan	TE	6-5	250	05/15/1983	1	Princeton
10	Holmes, Santonio	WR	5-11	189	03/03/1984	2	Ohio State
83	Miller, Heath	TE	6-5	256	10/22/1982	3	Virginia
15	Reid, Willie	WR	5-10	186	09/19/1982	2	Florida State
89	Spaeth, Matt	TE	6-7	270	11/24/1984	1	Minnesota
18	Trannon, Matt	WR	6-6	225	07/22/1983	0	Michigan State
19	Walker, Gerran	WR	5-10	185	10/02/1983	0	Lehigh
86	Ward, Hines	WR	6-0	205	03/08/1976	10	Georgia
85	Washington, Nate	WR	6-1	185	08/28/1983	3	Tiffin

#	DEFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
93	Eason, Nick	DE	6-3	305	05/29/1980	4	Clemson
98	Hampton, Casey	DT	6-1	325	09/03/1977	7	Texas
76	Hoke, Chris	DT	6-2	305	04/06/1976	4	Brigham Young
99	Keisel, Brett	DE	6-5	285	09/19/1978	5	Brigham Young
90	Kirschke, Travis	DE	6-3	298	09/06/1974	10	UCLA
95	McBean, Ryan	DE	6-5	290	04/23/1984	0	Oklahoma State
71	Paxson, Scott	DT	6-4	292	02/03/1983	0	Penn State
49	Retkofsky, Jared	DE	6-5	260	03/16/1983	0	TCU
91	Smith, Aaron	DE	6-5	298	04/09/1976	9	Northern Colorado

#	DEFENSIVE BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
23	Carter, Tyrone	S	5-9	195	03/31/1976	8	Minnesota
25	Clark, Ryan	S	5-11	205	10/12/1979	6	LSU
22	Gay, William	CB	5-10	190	01/01/1985	1	Louisville
45	Lorello, Mike	S	5-11	208	10/15/1984	0	West Virginia
37	Madison, Anthony	CB	5-9	180	10/08/1981	2	Alabama
41	Mason, Grant	CB	6-0	192	08/18/1983	1	Michigan
20	McFadden, Bryant	CB	6-0	190	11/21/1981	3	Florida State
43	Polamalu, Troy	S	5-10	207	04/19/1981	5	USC
27	Smith, Anthony	S	5-11	192	09/20/1983	2	Syracuse
24	Taylor, Ike	CB	6-1	191	05/05/1980	5	Louisiana-Lafayette
26	Townsend, Deshea	CB	5-10	190	09/08/1975	10	Alabama

#	LINEBACKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
51	Farrior, James	LB	6-2	243	01/06/1975	11	Virginia
50	Foote, Larry	LB	6-1	239	06/12/1980	6	Michigan
57	Fox, Keyaron	LB	6-3	235	01/24/1982	4	Georgia Tech
54	Frazier, Andre	LB	6-5	255	06/29/1982	3	Cincinnati
97	Harrison, Arnold	LB	6-3	241	10/20/1982	2	Georgia
92	Harrison, James	LB	6-0	242	05/04/1978	5	Kent State
94	Timmons, Lawrence	LB	6-1	234	05/14/1986	1	Florida State
48	Trucks, Anthony	LB	6-1	230	12/01/1983	0	Oregon
56	Woodley, LaMarr	LB	6-2	265	11/03/1984	1	Michigan

#	KICKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
3	Reed, Jeff	K	5-11	225	04/09/1979	6	North Carolina
9	Sepulveda, Daniel	P	6-3	230	01/12/1984	1	Baylor

▶ **MIKE TOMLIN,** *Head coach*

Bruce Arians, off. coord.; **Dick LeBeau**, def. coord.; **Ken Anderson**, quarterbacks; **Keith Butler**, linebackers; **James Daniel**, tight ends; **Randy Fichtner**, wide receivers; **Ray Horton**, def. backs; **Amos Jones**, asst. special teams; **Bob Ligashesky**, special teams; **John Mitchell**, asst. head coach/def. line; **Kirby Wilson**, running backs; **Larry Zierlein**, off. line

The coaches are reluctant to move right tackle Willie Colon to guard and replace him with Max Starks, who signed a one-year, $6.85 million tender as a transitional player. The Steelers don't think Colon runs well enough to handle the demands of a pulling guard. However, the team is hoping the addition of center Justin Hartwig, signed from the Panthers in free agency, will help the interior blocking. He was brought in for one reason—to be able to handle the big 350-pound-plus nose tackles the Steelers face in their division. Pittsburgh is solid at tackle with either Colon or Starks on the right side and veteran Marvel Smith on the left side. **GRADE: D+**

DEFENSE

Dick LeBeau's blitzing-style of defense is not built to spend a lot of time on the field because it relies on aggressiveness and disguise. That failed far too often last year, one of the reasons the defense faltered late in the season despite ranking No. 1 overall in the league. Nonetheless, the 3-4 defense is built to pressure the quarterback from the outside and confuse him with coverages.

Defensive line Tomlin said he needed to upgrade the defensive line in the offseason with big, young bodies to improve the depth. He didn't succeed.

The Steelers did not sign a lineman in free agency or select one in the draft. Even more surprisingly, they brought back a pair of veterans—Travis Kirschke, who is 33 with chronic back problems; and Nick Eason, who lasted one game as a replacement for injured defensive end Aaron Smith before he was replaced himself, by Kirschke.

The team's only hope for improvement is Ryan McBean, a fourth-round pick in 2007 who spent most of the season on the practice squad. McBean has the body type the coaches like in their defensive ends, but he had surgery to correct a stress fracture in his foot in the offseason and missed the team's voluntary workout program.

The season-ending torn bicep suffered by Smith in Week 14 was a bigger blow than anyone imagined, primarily because the team did not have the depth to overcome his loss. Smith is the team's most consistent lineman and its best at stopping the run. Without him, teams ran stretch plays and got big gains from cutback runs, because the ends could not hold up at the point of attack. Nose tackle Casey Hampton remains one of the best in the game because he is so hard to move. Defensive end Brett Keisel does a good job providing pressure, but he needs to finish more plays and produce more sacks. **GRADE: B**

OFFSEASON MOVES

ADDITIONS

RB **Mewelde Moore** *(FA/Vikings)*, LB **Keyaron Fox** *(FA/Chiefs)*, G **Justin Hartwig** *(FA/Panthers)*

SUBTRACTIONS

LB **Clint Kriewaldt** *(FA)*, TE **Jerame Tuman** *(FA/Cardinals)*, DB **Allen Rossum** *(FA/49ers)*, QB **Brian St. Pierre** *(FA/Cardinals)*, G **Alan Faneca** *(FA/Jets)*, LB **Marquis Cooper** *(FA)*, LB **Clark Haggans** *(FA/Cardinals)*, FB **Dan Kreider** *(FA)*, RB **Verron Haynes** *(FA)*, WR **Cedrick Wilson** *(FA)*

INSIDE THE HEADSET

MIKE TOMLIN

Tomlin proved in his first season that he is not afraid to gamble in short-yardage situations, no matter the field position or time of the game. Despite not having a reliable big back for goal-line situations, Tomlin was rarely reluctant to attempt fourth-and-1 conversions—a tendency that may change with age.

HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL

FANTASY SPIN

http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football

ROETHLISBERGER DAVENPORT MILLER

Last season, Willie Parker's owners were frustrated by his lack of scoring (2 TDs) and broken fibula. This year, the concerns are Mewelde Moore and rookie Rashard Mendenhall stealing touches and an O-line minus Alan Faneca.

BUY Ben Roethlisberger, QB

SELL Najeh Davenport, RB

SLEEPER Heath Miller, TE

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/09	W	34-7	at Cleveland Browns
09/16	W	26-3	Buffalo Bills
09/23	W	37-16	San Francisco 49ers
09/30	L	14-21	at Arizona Cardinals
10/07	W	21-0	Seattle Seahawks
10/21	L	28-31	at Denver Broncos
10/28	W	24-13	at Cincinnati Bengals
11/05	W	38-7	Baltimore Ravens
11/11	W	31-28	Cleveland Browns
11/18	L	16-19	at New York Jets
11/26	W	3-0	Miami Dolphins
12/02	W	24-10	Cincinnati Bengals
12/09	L	13-34	at New England Patriots
12/16	L	22-29	Jacksonville Jaguars
12/20	W	41-24	at St. Louis Rams
12/30	L	21-27	at Baltimore Ravens

WON 10, LOST 6

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Parker	321	1316	4.1	32	2
Davenport	107	499	4.7	45	5
Roethlisberger	35	204	5.8	30t	2
Davis	17	68	4.0	12	0
Wilson	2	37	18.5	37	0
Russell	7	21	3.0	8	0
Holmes	5	17	3.4	11	0
Ward	3	11	3.7	7	0
Kreider	1	2	2.0	2	0
Washington	1	0	0.0	0	0
Batch	12	-7	-0.6	0	0
STEELERS	**511**	**2168**	**4.2**	**45**	**9**
OPPONENTS	361	1438	4.0	38	6

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Ward	71	732	10.3	25	7
Holmes	52	942	18.1	83	8
Miller	47	566	12.0	29	7
Washington	29	450	15.5	40	5
Parker	23	164	7.1	22	0
Davenport	18	184	10.2	32t	2
Wilson	18	207	11.5	18	1
Davis	12	49	4.1	10	0
Spaeth	5	34	6.8	13t	3
Reid	4	54	13.5	25	0
Haynes	1	12	12.0	12	0
Kreider	1	15	15.0	15	0
Tuman	1	9	9.0	9t	1
STEELERS	**282**	**3418**	**12.1**	**83**	**34**
OPPONENTS	292	3067	10.5	63t	22

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Roethlisberger	404	264	3154	32	11
Batch	36	17	232	2	3
Parker	1	0	0	0	0
Sepulveda	1	1	32	0	0
STEELERS	**442**	**282**	**3418**	**34**	**14**
OPPONENTS	536	292	3067	22	11

SACKS STEELERS 36, OPPONENTS 47

Harrison 8.5, Farrior 6.5, Haggans 4, Woodley 4, Foote 3, Smith 2.5, Keisel 2, Kirschke 2, Clark 1, Taylor 1, Carter 0.5, Hampton 0.5, Hoke 0.5

HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL

Linebackers This position has the best young talent on the team. But it is also in transition, an evolution that began last year when James Harrison replaced Joey Porter and ended up the team MVP and a Pro Bowler. It will continue this season when LaMarr Woodley, last year's second-round pick and a pass-rushing demon, replaces veteran Clark Haggans at left-outside linebacker. In addition, the coaches want to see if Lawrence Timmons, last year's first-round pick, can play well enough inside to replace veteran Larry Foote. Harrison and Woodley could quickly develop into the best pass-rushing tandem in the league. Harrison used his great lower body strength and quickness to register a team-high 8.5 sacks and force seven fumbles last season. Woodley, a converted defensive end, rarely played but still ended up with four sacks. He is strong, quick and explosive, and will cause problems for right tackles who are isolated against him.

Timmons was used at outside linebacker last season, but he will be tried on the inside to take advantage of his ability to run and close on tackles. James Farrior, the other inside linebacker, is 33, but, like Ward, shows no sign of slowing down. He led the team with 94 tackles last season and was second behind Harrison with 6.5 sacks. Farrior does a good job of sifting through traffic and finding the ball, rarely getting caught out of position. **GRADE: B**

Secondary Depth, mistakes and an injury-riddled season from Pro Bowl safety Troy Polamalu combined to turn the secondary from an efficient unit for 12 weeks into a confused and inefficient one during the final month and a half. The biggest problems were at safety, and they began when Ryan Clark had his spleen removed, which ended his season after Week 7. That started a trickle-down effect in which his replacement, Anthony Smith, was benched for blowing assignments and allowing big pass plays in the middle of the field, and continued when his replacement, Tyrone Carter, missed two costly tackles in the playoff loss to the Jaguars.

The other problem, though, was that Polamalu, who was nagged by injuries all season, did not play in five games and was never the disruptive player of previous seasons, even though he was selected to his fourth Pro Bowl. Prior to that, the secondary was surprisingly efficient, allowing few long passes and getting strong play from veteran cornerback Deshea Townsend. However, the Steelers had only 11 interceptions last season (eight by the secondary), which tied for fewest in the league, because their cornerbacks don't make plays. Ike Taylor can run with receivers, but he drops a lot of potential interceptions. **GRADE: C**

SPECIAL TEAMS

The team has a reliable kicker in Jeff Reed, who is even better away from Heinz Field, and a young punter with a strong leg in Daniel Sepulveda. After that, everything is flimsy. The Steelers released Allen Rossum after one season as their kick returner and signed Moore, hoping he can be more consistent and productive. They're still unsure of their punt returner, especially because there are no guarantees that wide receiver Willie Reid, a disappointing 2006 third-round pick, will make the team.

And opposing returners ran through their coverage units easier than the EZ Pass lanes on the turnpike. The Steelers allowed a 96-yard kick return in their playoff loss to the Jaguars. Pittsburgh's punt coverage unit also gave up a 73-yard touchdown in a loss to Arizona and cost them in an overtime loss to the Jets. This, despite devoting entire training-camp practices to special teams and probably spending more time working on them during the regular season than any other NFL team.

Tomlin will give his special-teams coach, Bob Ligashesky, a second chance. Hopefully, signing linebacker Keyaron Fox in free agency and drafting Bruce Davis will help redeem him. **GRADE: D**

BOTTOM LINE

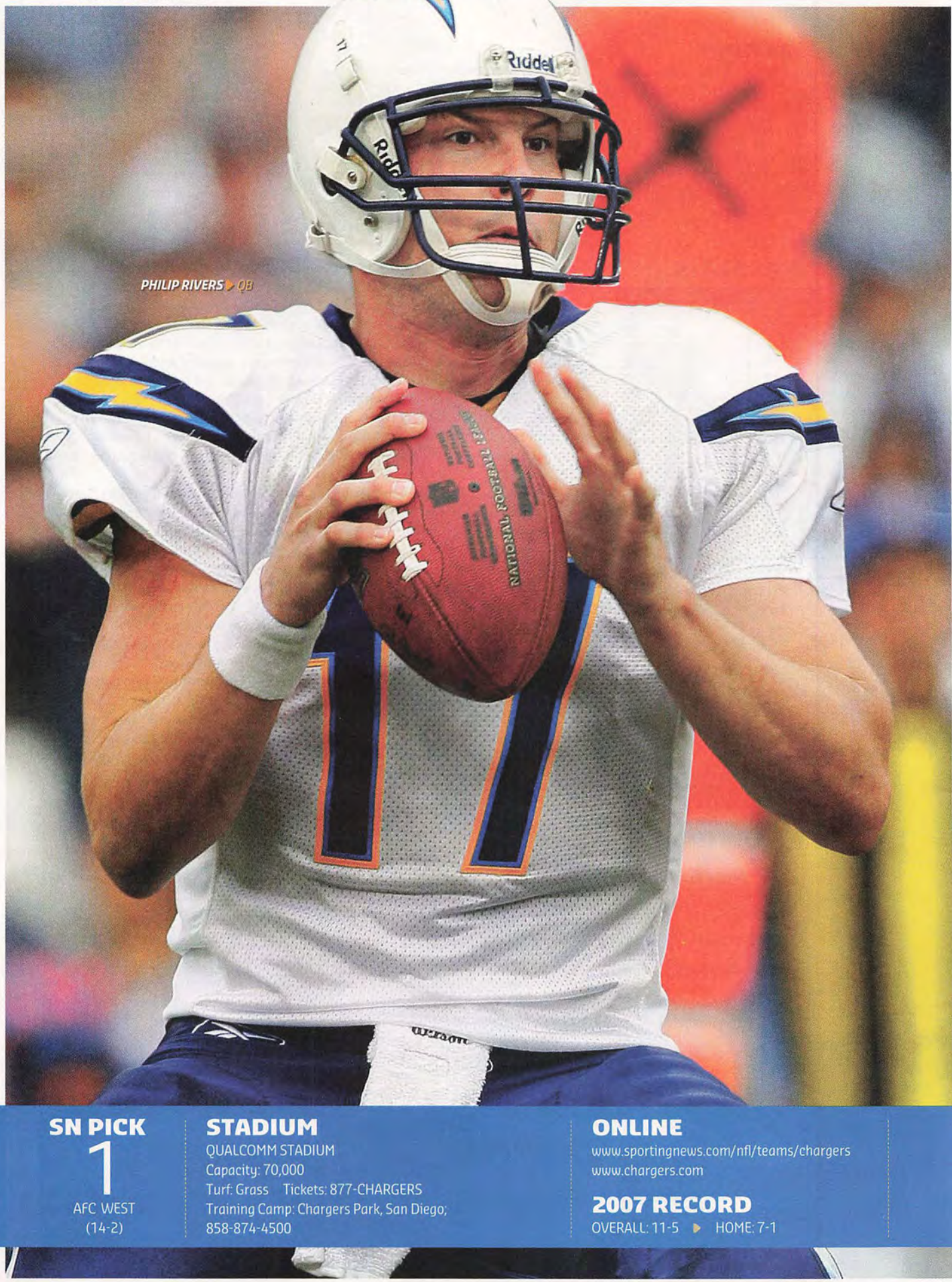
As long as the Steelers have Roethlisberger, they will be in every game. Throw in Parker, a two-time Pro Bowler, and good receivers in Ward, Holmes and Miller, and the offense has a chance to be very productive. With the tough schedule, the Steelers must get off to a fast start. If they don't, repeating as division champions will be difficult.

89

FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT

DOWN



SN PICK

1

AFC WEST
(14-2)

STADIUM

QUALCOMM STADIUM
Capacity: 70,000
Turf: Grass Tickets: 877-CHARGERS
Training Camp: Chargers Park, San Diego;
858-874-4500

ONLINE

www.sportingnews.com/nfl/teams/chargers
www.chargers.com

2007 RECORD

OVERALL: 11-5 ▶ HOME: 7-1

(L TO R): CHARLES SMALL / US PRESSWIRE; G NEWMAN LOWRANCE / GETTY IMAGES; HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL

SAN DIEGO CHARGERS

All indicators point to a Super-charged season

By Kevin Acee, *San Diego Union-Tribune*

The continuity the Chargers said they'd have last season is really there this year, as the players know what the coaches want, the coaches know what they have in the players and both are ready to take the next step in Norv Turner's second season as head coach.

"Our guys know what we're doing," Turner says. "There's a comfort level."

There should be.

The AFC runners-up return 20 starters, and the other two starters for '08 were on the roster and played plenty last season.

With a seemingly favorable schedule, it appears the only thing that could hold the Chargers back is injuries.

And there are plenty of those to worry about even before the season begins.

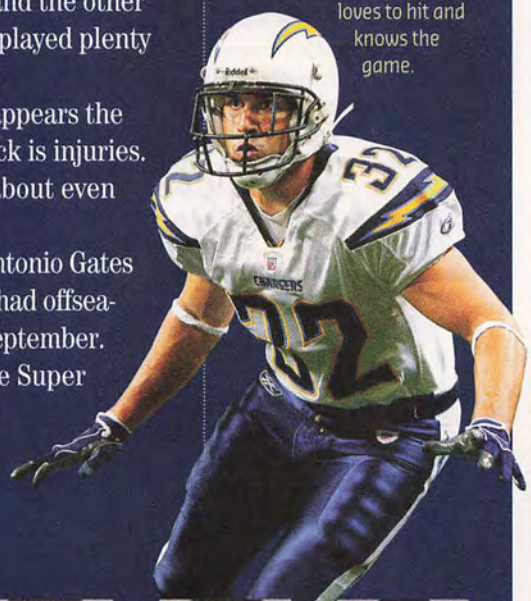
Center Nick Hardwick (foot), tight end Antonio Gates (toe) and fullback Andrew Pinnock (knee) had offseason surgeries and may not be ready come September.

If the injury news is good, this is a prime Super Bowl contender.

BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

ERIC WEDDLE ▸ FS

Weddle played nickel, free safety and strong safety at times in 2007 and now becomes the starter at free. The Chargers gave up a lot to get him, and no one knows yet just how good he might be. They'll find out now. The way he plays almost defies physics. Weddle is not big or terribly fast. He is simply always where the ball is, loves to hit and knows the game.



FANTASY SPIN

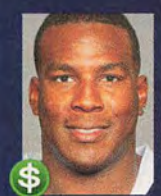
http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football

Don't worry about LaDainian Tomlinson's 2007 knee injury slowing him down this season. Last year's poor ending will be one more thing motivating L.T. to dominate in '08.

$ BUY »» Antonio Gates, TE

SELL »» Vincent Jackson, WR

Z SLEEPER »» Chris Chambers, WR



GATES

JACKSON

CHAMBERS

OFFENSE

The Chargers are not much different with Turner calling the plays than they were under his predecessor, Cam Cameron. They are LaDainian Tomlinson-and-Gates centered and will remain so, provided Gates is healthy. Turner will likely open up the offense more this season to take advantage of the emergence of his young receivers, who will be better prepared to keep defenses from loading up to stop Tomlinson.

Quarterbacks » Philip Rivers has established himself as a leader and a pretty good player, too. He learned a lot about being a consistent quarterback in '07 after getting a sort of free pass on the 14-2 team of 2006. His reconstructed ACL should be 100 percent by the season's start, and he has a better stable of receivers to throw to than the Chargers have had in decades. Rivers doesn't have the strongest arm in the NFL or even the AFC West, but he is smart, resourceful and amazingly accurate on most short throws.

Billy Volek, a former starter in the league, and Charlie Whitehurst set the Chargers up well with backup arms. Re-signing Volek was San Diego's top offseason priority because he brings injury protection and experience. Whitehurst, the son of former Green Bay quarterback David Whitehurst, is a promising young passer who will likely never play for the Chargers. He has been the object of other teams' trade desires, but general manager A.J. Smith wants to keep him around. **GRADE: A**

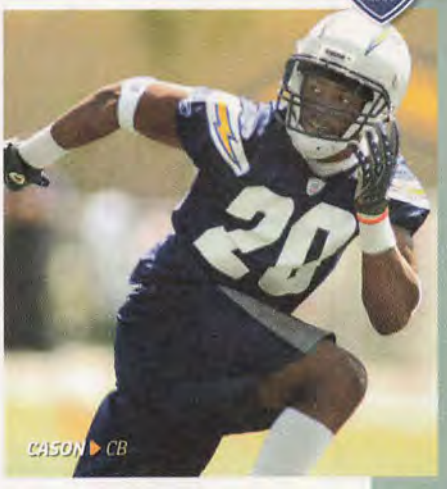
Running backs » The Chargers might feel the loss of Michael Turner to free agency, but they'll take their chances with Tomlinson. The face of the franchise has done unprecedented things for a running back and does not appear to be slowing down. He has won the past two rushing titles and should only benefit from an offense that will be more open now that the receivers and quarterback are seasoned and everyone knows the coach.

To replace Turner, the Chargers traded into the third round to draft LSU's Jacob Hester. The college fullback reminds the San Diego scouts of Turner in size and running style, and they expect him to be a fine complement to Tomlinson.

Scatback Darren Sproles surprised even Chargers coaches last year with

DRAFT REPORT GRADE ▶ B-

The Chargers had four areas of need heading into the draft: offensive tackle, cornerback, running back and wide receiver. **Antoine Cason** gives them a very talented leader with outstanding intangibles and character. He has the great instincts, closing burst and ball skills to break up passes when he's in good position and does not hesitate to step up and tackle running backs in run support. He should be the primary nickel back as a rookie. San Diego made a bold move to trade up for FB **Jacob Hester**, who it feels can replace Michael Turner as the backup running back. Hester is an instinctive runner who can find the hole and has surprising quickness getting through it. He consistently gains yards after contact. Fifth-round pick **Marcus Thomas** may end up being a better running back than Hester, but whether he'll get a chance to develop remains a question. **DeJuan Tribble** made for a nice late-round addition. At the close of the 2007 season, he was viewed as a second- or third-rounder who had everything but elite speed. But Tribble struggled mightily at the Senior Bowl, then timed in the 4.6 range in the pre-draft workouts, causing his stock to plummet. **Corey Clark** is a tough and highly competitive offensive tackle with decent athleticism for his size. He could end up winning the starting job at right tackle, as Jeromey Clary might be moved to guard.


CASON ▶ CB

2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
1	27	Cason, Antoine	CB	6-0	185	Arizona
3	6	Hester, Jacob	RB	6-0	224	LSU
5	31	Thomas, Marcus	RB	6-2	215	UTEP
6	26	Tribble, DeJuan	CB	5-9	190	Boston College
7	27	Clark, Corey	T	6-6	315	Texas A&M

5-YEAR WINS TREND

THE BOOK ON ... LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"What makes him great is vision. He sees things so well, so he can set people up. And he's got great hands. Some backs, you say, 'Yeah, give him the ball.' You don't want the ball in LT's hands, and they can get it to him so many different ways. They can play him anywhere, so he totally sets your defense up. And it all breaks down to vision. A lot of people try to stop him by putting eight in the box. That might work, but the more times he gets a look at what you're doing, he's going to pop one sooner or later. Is he the greatest running back in the game? Arguably. Two years ago, he was the best. Last year, he was one of the best. With running backs, they get better as they get older before they descend. He's still going up. He hasn't started his descent yet."

NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	315.3	20
RUSHING	127.4	7
PASSING	187.8	26
SCORING	412	5
PUNT RETURNS	8.8	15
KICK RETURNS	25.5	3
RED ZONE TD %	55.8	11
TOTAL DEFENSE	320.3	14
AGAINST RUSH	107.0	16
AGAINST PASS	213.3	14
POINTS ALLOWED	284	5
INTERCEPTIONS	30	1
SACKS	42	5
TURNOVER DIFF.	+24	1

TOP TO BOTTOM: STAN LIU / US PRESSWIRE; ALBERT DICKSON / SN

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE *(an opponent breaks down the Chargers)*

"Obviously, that's a good team. They play in a division they can win. Of course, they have some players that are just OK. Every team has players that would have trouble playing on other teams. But I don't see how they don't make the playoffs. C'mon, we were all wondering what was going on there last year with Norv (Turner). But they obviously are comfortable now. It will be interesting to see what the offense does (in Turner's second) year. To say they have the most talent in the league is not a stretch, but that's impossible to say. I'd like to have their talent, though. You might have more success running against them than you used to. Jamal Williams is not what he was two years ago. I don't think it's any secret that their weakness, if they have one, is down the middle. (Cornerbacks Antonio) Cromartie and (Quentin) Jammer are solid, more than solid."

his ability and durability from scrimmage. He must still be used discriminately in certain situations, but Sproles can mix things up on third down and with screens.

Hester can play fullback, too, and will likely be listed as one. Fifth-round pick Marcus Thomas from UTEP will likely be the fifth back on the roster. **GRADE: A**

Receivers » Chris Chambers is the biggest reason the Chargers made the playoffs last season. They were 3-3 without him, 8-2 after he was acquired in a trade and 6-0 after he and Rivers started to mesh with each other. Chambers caught almost every ball thrown his way and was a fantastic influence on Vincent Jackson. Chambers' mere presence sparked Jackson, who saw himself as a No. 1 receiver and may be worthy of such a label in the near future.

Jackson plays as physical as he is big (6-5, 241 pounds) and in the second half of 2007 added consistency to his ability to make the spectacular catch.

The fact that those two would justify Gates being a third mention here speaks volumes. Gates makes the Chargers' offense what it is. Without him requiring the attention of a defensive back and a linebacker, Tomlinson would be suffocated more than he is. And Rivers can't count the number of times Gates has saved him with an improbable catch.

Second-year players Buster Davis and Legedu Naanee have their own unique talents—Davis in the slot and Naanee anywhere from H-back to wideout. They should both have at least 20 catches this year.

Eric Parker returns from a toe injury after missing all of 2007. He could be traded late in the preseason or return to being one of Rivers' most reliable targets. Then the Chargers will have too many hands for one ball. **GRADE: A**

Offensive line » All of the starters return from last season, and four of them have been together for two years.

The left side—guard Kris Dielman and tackle Marcus McNeill—earned a trip to the Pro Bowl last season. It was McNeill's second all-star appearance in two NFL seasons, and he played well enough over the final four games and playoffs to merit consideration as one of the best in the league. Dielman is the best.

The big concern going into this year is whether center Hardwick, a Pro Bowler two seasons ago, will be ready for the season opener following foot surgery in March. When Hardwick was out four games with the original foot injury, the Chargers struggled. Backup Cory Withrow is serviceable and nothing more. Hardwick lends a relentless attitude to go with his talent and savvy.

Right guard Mike Goff is as tough as they come, but time is running out on his career in San Diego, as he is now 32. Next to him is Jeromey Clary, the youngster who will likely move inside next year to replace Goff. For now, Clary is a better technician and more agile than he gets credit for.

Depth at tackle is a concern, but barring injury this group will be fine. **GRADE: B**

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		
QB	Philip Rivers	Billy Volek
FB	Andrew Pinnock	Jacob Hester
RB	LaDainian Tomlinson	Marcus Thomas
WR	Chris Chambers	Legedu Naanee
WR	Vincent Jackson	Buster Davis
TE	Antonio Gates	Brandon Manumaleuna
LT	Marcus McNeill	Tony Pape
LG	Kris Dielman	Scott Mruczkowski
C	Nick Hardwick	Cory Withrow
RG	Mike Goff	Scott Mruczkowski
RT	Jeromey Clary	Tony Pape
DEFENSE		
LE	Luis Castillo	Jacques Cesaire
DT	Jamal Williams	Brandon McKinney
RE	Igor Olshansky	Ryon Bingham
OLB	Shawne Merriman	Jyles Tucker
ILB	Matt Wilhelm	Anthony Waters
ILB	Stephen Cooper	Derek Smith
OLB	Shaun Phillips	Marques Harris
CB	Antonio Cromartie	Antoine Cason
CB	Quentin Jammer	Cletis Gordon
SS	Clinton Hart	Steve Gregory
FS	Eric Weddle	Paul Oliver
SPECIALISTS		
K	Nate Kaeding	
P	Mike Scifres	
KR	Darren Sproles	
PR	Darren Sproles	
LS	Dave Binn	

DEFENSE

Coordinator Ted Cottrell runs his 3-4 defense based on tendencies rather than just bringing everything after the quarterback like former

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 Carolina	SEPT. 7	4:15	W / L
WEEK 2 @ Denver	SEPT. 14	4:15	W / L
WEEK 3 New York Jets	SEPT. 22	8:30	W / L
WEEK 4 @ Oakland	SEPT. 28	4:05	W / L
WEEK 5 @ Miami	OCT. 5	1:00	W / L
WEEK 6 New England	OCT. 12	8:15	W / L
WEEK 7 @ Buffalo	OCT. 19	1:00	W / L
WEEK 8 @ New Orleans *(in London)*	OCT. 26	1:00	W / L
WEEK 9 *OPEN DATE*			
WEEK 10 Kansas City	NOV. 9	4:15	W / L
WEEK 11 @ Pittsburgh	NOV. 16	4:15	W / L
WEEK 12 Indianapolis	NOV. 23	8:15	W / L
WEEK 13 Atlanta	NOV. 30	4:05	W / L
WEEK 14 Oakland	DEC. 4	8:15	W / L
WEEK 15 @ Kansas City	DEC. 14	1:00	W / L
WEEK 16 @ Tampa Bay	DEC. 21	8:15	W / L
WEEK 17 Denver	DEC. 28	4:15	W / L

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

San Diego coordinator Wade Phillips. The players understand that better now and seem to have bought in to the benefits of picking and choosing when to blitz. The secondary is as good as it has been in several years, but continued success against the run depends largely on the health of nose tackle Jamal Williams.

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/09	W	14-3	Chicago Bears
09/16	L	14-38	at New England Patriots
09/23	L	24-31	at Green Bay Packers
09/30	L	16-30	Kansas City Chiefs
10/07	W	41-3	at Denver Broncos
10/14	W	28-14	Oakland Raiders
10/28	W	35-10	Houston Texans
11/04	L	17-35	at Minnesota Vikings
11/11	W	23-21	Indianapolis Colts
11/18	L	17-24	at Jacksonville Jaguars
11/25	W	32-14	Baltimore Ravens
12/02	W	24-10	at Kansas City Chiefs
12/09	W	23-17	at Tennessee Titans
12/16	W	51-14	Detroit Lions
12/24	W	23-3	Denver Broncos
12/30	W	30-17	at Oakland Raiders

WON 11, LOST 5

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Tomlinson	315	1474	4.7	49	15
Turner	71	316	4.5	74t	1
Sproles	37	164	4.4	34	2
Rivers	29	33	1.1	10	1
Neal	13	32	2.5	10	0
Chambers	2	17	8.5	9	0
Davis	3	9	3.0	6	0
Pinnock	4	1	0.3	5	0
Volek	11	-7	-0.6	0	0
CHARGERS	485	2039	4.2	74t	19
OPPONENTS	416	1712	4.1	64t	11

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Gates	75	984	13.1	49t	9
Tomlinson	60	475	7.9	36	3
Jackson	41	623	15.2	45	3
Chambers	35	555	15.9	44	4
Davis	20	188	9.4	18	1
Manumaleuna	10	86	8.6	40	1
Sproles	10	31	3.1	14	0
Naanee	8	69	8.6	22	0
Neal	8	23	2.9	9	1
Floyd	7	97	13.9	25	0
Turner	4	16	4.0	12	0
Osgood	2	23	11.5	15	0
Pinnock	1	5	5.0	5	0
CHARGERS	281	3175	11.3	49t	22
OPPONENTS	338	3684	10.9	57t	20

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Rivers	460	277	3152	21	15
Volek	10	3	6	0	1
Tomlinson	1	1	17	1	0
CHARGERS	471	281	3175	22	16
OPPONENTS	555	338	3684	20	30

SACKS — CHARGERS 42, OPPONENTS 24

Merriman 12.5, Phillips 8.5, Olshansky 3.5, Tucker 3.5, Castillo 2.5, Cesaire 2.5, Cooper 2, Bingham 1.5, Harris 1.5, Hart 1, Polk 1, Weddle 1, Wilhelm 1

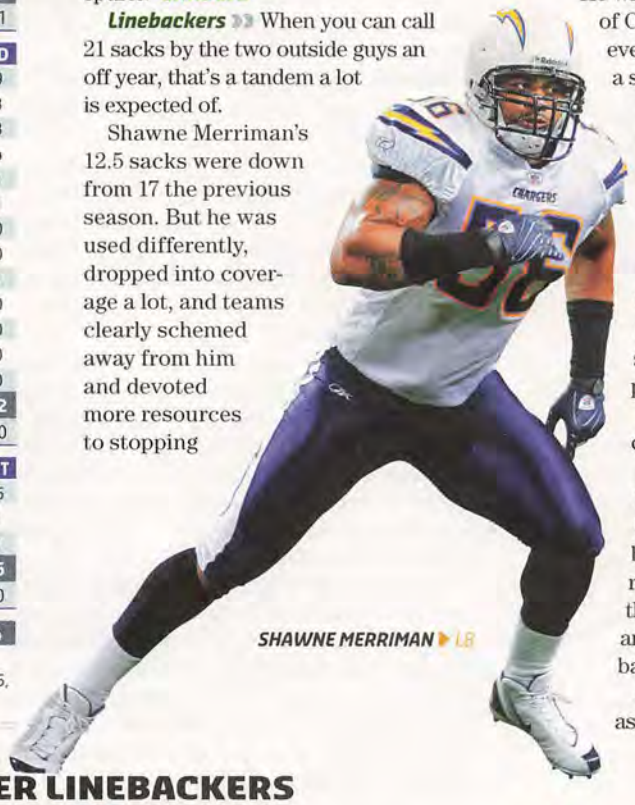
Defensive line Williams is the center of the defense. If his knees can stay healthy enough, offensive lines must devote two players to him. That didn't happen last year as often as it used to. The Chargers know they can't count on Williams for all of 16 games, so the play of Ryon Bingham and Brandon McKinney is paramount.

On the right side, Igor Olshanksy had his best season in '07. He added an ability to move laterally and chase the quarterback to his impressive run-stopping prowess. Right end Luis Castillo is still stuck in the dreaded "potential" dimension, if only because of injuries. So athletic and quick for 290 pounds, Castillo has been slowed by ankle problems the past two seasons. Now in his fourth campaign, Castillo must stay healthy for an entire season to finally ascend to the Pro Bowl level that he has flashed at times.

With the injuries they have sustained over the past two years, the Chargers are fortunate to have a backup like Jacques Cesaire, who can fill in at both ends and even play inside for spurts. **GRADE: B**

Linebackers When you can call 21 sacks by the two outside guys an off year, that's a tandem a lot is expected of.

Shawne Merriman's 12.5 sacks were down from 17 the previous season. But he was used differently, dropped into coverage a lot, and teams clearly schemed away from him and devoted more resources to stopping him. All things considered, it may have been the most complete of his three NFL seasons.



SHAWNE MERRIMAN ▸ LB

On the other side, Shaun Phillips struggled in Cottrell's new scheme and was frustrated by opponents' quick passes designed to stop the AFC's most productive sacking duo. But Phillips continued to make big plays with his long arms and pure athletic ability. He and Merriman simply find the ball.

Inside, the Chargers should be better because Matt Wilhelm learned a great deal in his first season as a starter. Stephen Cooper will miss the first quarter of the season due to a failed drug test, and veteran newcomer Derek Smith will have to step in. Cooper was a solid run-stopper and made his mark as a first-year regular in '07.

The Chargers are excited to see what Anthony Waters will do after sitting out his rookie season with a knee injury.

He will see more time in place of Cooper and is expected to eventually challenge Wilhelm for a starting job.

Brandon Siler, Carlos Polk and Tim Dobbins are mostly special-teams contributors, but all have been superb in that role. **GRADE: B+**

Secondary Much improved in the defensive backfield last year, San Diego brings back three of four starters and plugs in a key package player at free safety.

The Chargers had 30 interceptions in '07, the third most in team history and their highest since the 1960s. All but eight of those picks were by defensive backs. A team-record and league-leading 10 of them were made by super-tall and freakishly athletic cornerback Antonio Cromartie.

A second straight season as one of the league's most

OFFSEASON MOVES

ADDITIONS:
LB **Derek Smith** *(FA/49ers)*

SUBTRACTIONS:
FB **Lorenzo Neal** *(FA)*, DB **Marlon McCree** *(FA/Broncos)*, T **Shane Olivea** *(FA)*, K **Dave Rayner** *(FA/Dolphins)*, CB **Drayton Florence** *(FA/Jaguars)*, RB **Michael Turner** *(FA/Falcons)*

CHARGERS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1 Junior Seau *(1990-2002)*

The Tasmanian Devil accumulated 12 Pro Bowls, 47 sacks and more than 1,200 tackles during his time in San Diego.

2 Shawne Merriman *(2005-present)*

Has posted double-digit sack totals in each of his three seasons in the pros, including a league-best 17 during his sophomore campaign.

3 Donnie Edwards *(2002-06)*

Recorded 738 tackles and a ridiculous 17 interceptions in five years with the Chargers while never missing a game.

ALBERT DICKSON / SN

INSIDE THE HEADSET

NORV TURNER

Turner is not a predictable play-caller. But in his first season as Chargers head coach, he was not exactly a daredevil either. Now that the players know him better—and vice versa—the offense should open up more in '08. Turner's strongest attribute might be a belief in what he's doing. Even as last season threatened to crumble, he never changed, and finally the players believed.

consistent shutdown corners has Quentin Jammer at the peak of his game. He can't catch passes, but Jammer can knock them down.

First-round draft pick Antoine Cason is expected to be the third corner. He appears rangy enough to play inside or outside in the nickel package. Cletis Gordon and sixth-round pick DeJuan Tribble will compete for time, but they'll have to earn their roster spots by standing out on special teams.

Eric Weddle steps into the free-safety spot vacated when Marlon McCree was released. Weddle doesn't look like anything special, but he knows how to find the ball. Even in limited action as a rookie he made memorable plays.

Clinton Hart was a surprise at strong safety in 2007 and returns for at least another season there. He was solid against the run and made limited mistakes.

Paul Oliver, drafted as a cornerback in the fourth round of the 2007 supplemental draft, spent last season on the inactive list. He is now moving to safety, though he will get preseason reps at corner as well. **GRADE: B**

SPECIAL TEAMS

One of the great crimes in the NFL is the annual snubbing of Mike Scifres for the Pro Bowl. Consider: Over the past four seasons, no one has a higher net average (38.6 yards), more punts downed inside the 20 (125) or fewer punts not returned (36.2 percent).

Kicker Nate Kaeding seemingly put his playoff troubles behind him when he was 4-for-4 in the wind at New England in the AFC championship game. To that point, he had missed at least one field goal in each of his four career postseason games. It's a strange statistic, since Kaeding is the league's most accurate kicker over the last three regular seasons.

The man who has snapped the ball to Chargers punters and holders for 14 seasons is Dave Binn, one of the most consistent long snappers in the game. **GRADE: A-**

BOTTOM LINE

The Chargers are in the middle of what everyone in the organization acknowledges is a limited window of opportunity with the current roster. The third-winningest team in the NFL over the past four seasons, the time is now for Tomlinson, Merriman, Rivers, et al.

The Chargers play in a bad division and seem to have a favorable schedule—their first five games are against teams that had losing records in '07.

The playoffs are a certainty.

Now that the kinks on offense and defense between players and coaches have had a year to work themselves out, the Chargers are too stocked with the talent not to be among the top contenders for the Super Bowl.

95

FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT ▲ UP

ROSTER

#	QUARTERBACKS	>>	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
8	Bramlet, Casey	QB	6-4	220	04/02/1981	0	Wyoming
17	Rivers, Philip	QB	6-5	228	12/08/1981	4	North Carolina State
7	Volek, Billy	QB	6-2	214	04/28/1976	6	Fresno State
6	Whitehurst, Charlie	QB	6-4	227	08/06/1982	1	Clemson

#	OFFENSIVE LINE	>>	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
50	Binn, David	C	6-3	223	02/06/1972	14	California
66	Clary, Jeromey	T	6-6	306	11/05/1983	1	Kansas State
68	Dielman, Kris	G	6-4	310	02/03/1981	5	Indiana
79	Goff, Mike	G	6-5	311	01/06/1976	10	Iowa
61	Hardwick, Nick	C	6-4	295	09/02/1981	4	Purdue
73	McNeill, Marcus	T	6-7	336	11/16/1983	2	Auburn
63	Mruczkowski, Scott	G	6-5	318	04/05/1982	3	Bowling Green
77	Pape, Tony	T	6-6	302	09/29/1981	0	Michigan
65	Withrow, Cory	C	6-2	287	04/05/1975	8	Washington State

#	RUNNING BACKS	>>	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
30	Buckley, Eldra	RB	5-9	207	06/23/1985	0	Chattanooga
34	Pinnock, Andrew	RB	5-10	250	03/12/1980	5	South Carolina
43	Sproles, Darren	RB	5-6	181	06/20/1983	2	Kansas State
21	Tomlinson, LaDainian	RB	5-10	221	06/23/1979	7	TCU

#	RECEIVERS	>>	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
89	Chambers, Chris	WR	5-11	210	08/12/1978	7	Wisconsin
87	Chandler, Scott	TE	6-7	265	07/23/1985	1	Iowa
84	Davis, Buster	WR	6-1	207	10/02/1985	1	LSU
80	Floyd, Malcom	WR	6-5	225	09/08/1981	3	Wyoming
85	Gates, Antonio	TE	6-4	260	06/18/1980	5	Kent State
83	Jackson, Vincent	WR	6-5	241	01/14/1983	3	Northern Colorado
86	Manumaleuna, Brandon	TE	6-2	288	01/04/1980	7	Arizona
11	Naanee, Legedu	WR	6-2	226	09/16/1983	1	Boise State
81	Osgood, Kassim	WR	6-5	220	05/20/1980	5	San Diego State
88	Parker, Eric	WR	6-0	180	04/14/1979	5	Tennessee

#	DEFENSIVE LINE	>>	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
97	Bingham, Ryon	DT	6-3	303	06/06/1981	3	Nebraska
93	Castillo, Luis	DE	6-3	290	08/04/1983	3	Northwestern
74	Cesaire, Jacques	DE	6-2	295	08/30/1980	5	Southern Connecticut State
78	Coleman, Andre	DE	6-3	287	07/26/1984	0	Albany
96	Grennan, Keith	DE	6-4	298	05/20/1984	0	Eastern Washington
90	Jackson, Keith	DT	6-0	305	02/25/1985	0	Arkansas
91	McKinney, Brandon	DT	6-2	324	08/24/1983	2	Michigan State
99	Olshansky, Igor	DE	6-6	309	05/03/1982	4	Oregon
76	Williams, Jamal	DT	6-3	348	04/28/1976	10	Oklahoma State

#	DEFENSIVE BACKS	>>	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
36	Battle, Tra	S	5-11	173	01/05/1985	0	Georgia
31	Cromartie, Antonio	CB	6-2	203	04/15/1984	2	Florida State
24	Gordon, Cletis	CB	6-1	197	04/23/1983	2	Jackson State
28	Gregory, Steve	CB	5-11	185	01/08/1983	2	Syracuse
42	Hart, Clinton	S	6-0	205	07/20/1977	5	Central Florida CC
23	Jammer, Quentin	CB	6-0	204	06/19/1979	6	Texas
27	Oliver, Paul	CB	6-0	208	03/30/1984	0	Georgia
32	Weddle, Eric	S	5-11	200	01/04/1985	1	Utah

#	LINEBACKERS	>>	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
49	Applewhite, Antwan	LB	6-3	246	12/31/1985	0	San Diego State
54	Cooper, Stephen	LB	6-1	235	06/19/1979	5	Maine
51	Dobbins, Tim	LB	6-1	246	12/10/1982	2	Iowa State
92	Harris, Marques	LB	6-1	245	09/20/1981	3	Southern Utah
56	Merriman, Shawne	LB	6-4	272	05/25/1984	3	Maryland
45	Nande, Terna	LB	6-0	230	06/17/1983	1	Miami (OH)
95	Phillips, Shaun	LB	6-3	262	05/13/1981	4	Purdue
52	Polk, Carlos	LB	6-2	262	02/22/1977	6	Nebraska
59	Siler, Brandon	LB	6-2	239	12/05/1985	1	Florida
58	Smith, Derek	LB	6-2	237	01/18/1975	11	Arizona State
94	Tucker, Jyles	LB	6-3	258	09/18/1983	1	Wake Forest
53	Waters, Anthony	LB	6-3	238	07/25/1984	0	Clemson
57	Wilhelm, Matt	LB	6-4	245	02/02/1981	5	Ohio State

#	KICKERS	>>	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
10	Kaeding, Nate	K	6-0	187	03/26/1982	4	Iowa
5	Scifres, Mike	P	6-2	236	10/08/1980	5	Western Illinois

▶ **NORV TURNER**, *Head coach*

Clarence Shelmon, off. coord.; **Ted Cottrell**, def. coord.; **Clancy Barone**, tight ends; **Bill Bradley**, secondary; **Steve Crosby**, special teams; **John "Jack" Henry**, off. line; **Hal Hunter**, off. line; **Charlie Joiner**, wide receivers; **John Pagano**, outside linebackers; **John Ramsdell**, quarterbacks; **Ron Rivera**, inside linebackers; **Kevin Ross**, asst. secondary/quality control; **Ollie Wilson**, running backs; **Wayne Nunnely**, defensive line

HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL

TENNESSEE TITANS

Can Vince Young get his groove back under a new offensive coordinator?

By Jim Wyatt, *The (Nashville) Tennessean*

The Titans exceeded expectations in 2007, winning 10 games and making the playoffs in a year in which most figured they'd be lucky to finish .500.

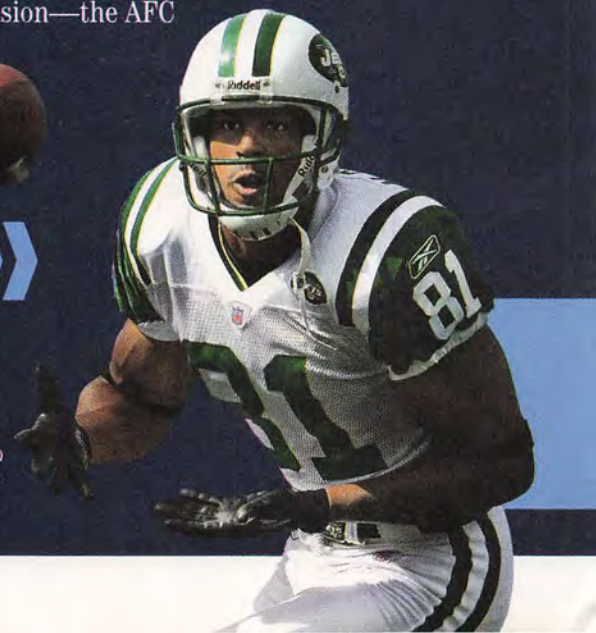
In 2008, they want to make even bigger strides, but it's going to require stepping things up on offense.

Veterans believe the foundation has been laid for good things ahead.

"Normally we come into the season wondering what we are going to do or how we're going to do. Now we know," Titans linebacker Keith Bulluck says. "We have an identity. We are a playoff team and we'll have a better shot (this) year."

All eyes are on quarterback Vince Young, who's headed into his third season. The NFL's Offensive Rookie of the Year in 2006 struggled in his sophomore campaign, and offensive woes kept the Titans from advancing past the first round of the playoffs.

The Titans will have some new faces on both sides of the ball this fall. In the league's toughest division—the AFC South produced three playoff teams in '07—they'll need to jell quickly.



BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

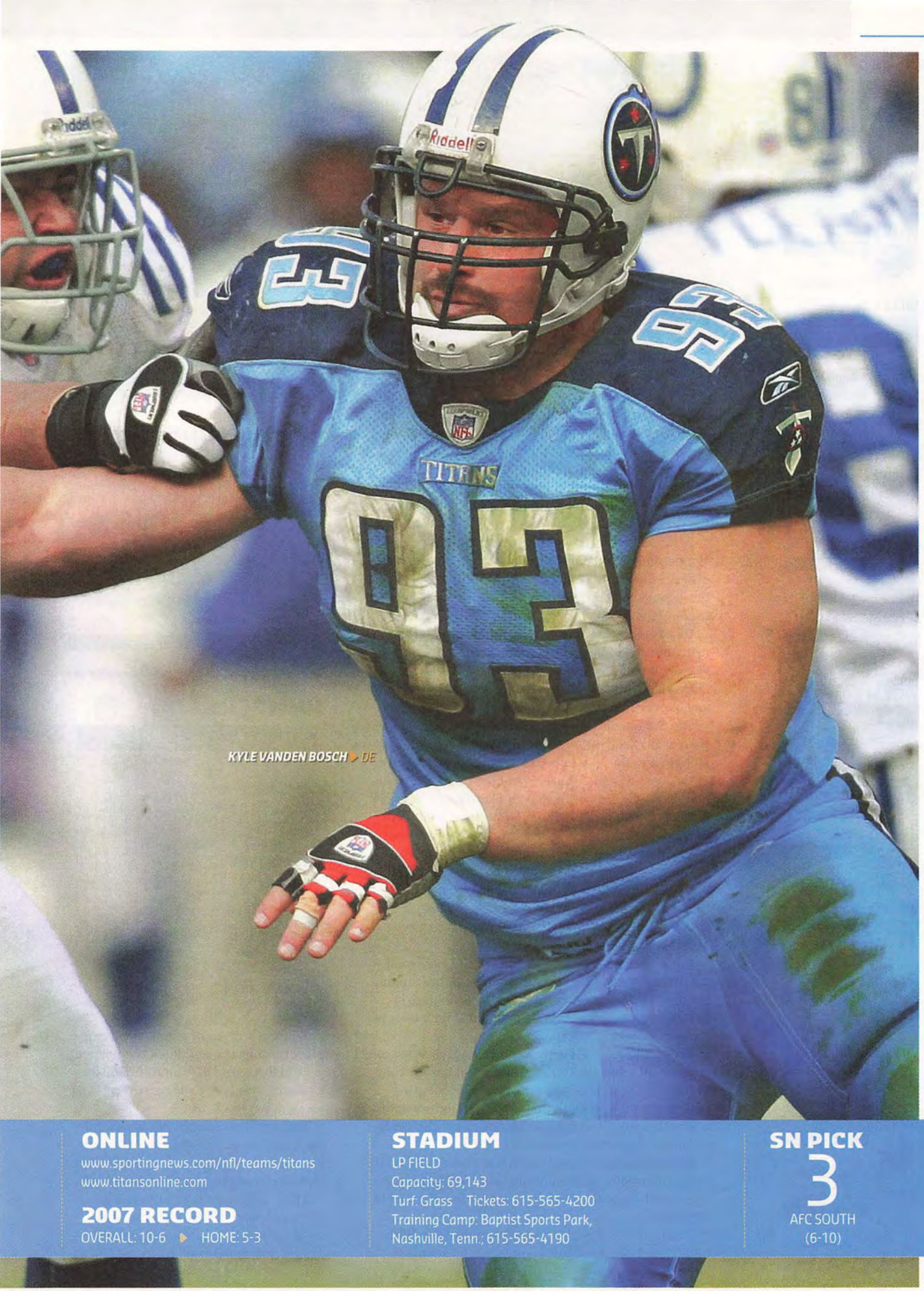
JUSTIN McCAREINS ▸ WR

In his first stint at Tennessee, McCareins had some of his most productive seasons playing under offensive coordinator Mike Heimerdinger. After four years with the Jets, he will be reunited with Heimerdinger this fall. McCareins is the type of player who could flourish again. He's physical enough to get balls in traffic, fast enough to stretch the field. On a team searching for playmakers, he could make a big impact under a familiar coach.

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE

(an opponent breaks down the Titans)

"The first thing you notice when you watch the Titans on defense isn't necessarily big defensive tackle Albert Haynesworth in the middle. Instead, it's defensive end Kyle Vanden Bosch on the outside. Vanden Bosch stands out because he gives a total effort on every play, and is relentless in his pursuit of the quarterback. You can tell the other guys on the team feed off of that. How can they relax when this guy is playing like that on every play? Tennessee's defensive approach is simple: They want to stop the run and they are equipped to do it, from their defensive line to their speedy linebackers to physical players in the secondary who are good tacklers. Cornerback Cortland Finnegan is an up-and-coming player who most coaches consider the best of the cornerbacks. He plays nasty and physical and is solid in coverage. While Nick Harper remains solid, it's easier to throw to his side. He's not as fast as he used to be and isn't as quick as he used to be. The safeties are mostly disciplined, but Michael Griffin still appears afraid to make mistakes and sometimes lines up too deep."



KYLE VANDEN BOSCH ▶ DE

ONLINE

www.sportingnews.com/nfl/teams/titans
www.titansonline.com

2007 RECORD

OVERALL: 10-6 ▶ HOME: 5-3

STADIUM

LP FIELD
Capacity: 69,143
Turf: Grass Tickets: 615-565-4200
Training Camp: Baptist Sports Park,
Nashville, Tenn.; 615-565-4190

SN PICK

3
AFC SOUTH
(6-10)

OPPOSITE: AL PEREIRA / GETTY IMAGES; MARVIN GENTRY / US PRESSWIRE

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 Jacksonville — SEPT. 7 | 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 2 @ Cincinnati — SEPT. 14 | 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 3 Houston — SEPT. 21 | 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 4 Minnesota — SEPT. 28 | 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 5 @ Baltimore — OCT. 5 | 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 6 *OPEN DATE*

WEEK 7 @ Kansas City — OCT. 19 | 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 8 Indianapolis — OCT. 27 | 8:30 — SCORE

WEEK 9 Green Bay — NOV. 2 | 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 10 @ Chicago — NOV. 9 | 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 11 @ Jacksonville — NOV. 16 | 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 12 N.Y. Jets — NOV. 23 | 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 13 @ Detroit — NOV. 27 | 12:30 — SCORE

WEEK 14 Cleveland — DEC. 7 | 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 15 @ Houston — DEC. 14 | 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 16 Pittsburgh — DEC. 21 | 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 17 @ Indianapolis — DEC. 28 | 1:00 — SCORE

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

THE BOOK ON ... VINCE YOUNG *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"Young is at his best when he gets loose in the open field, so the key is to keep him from getting there. And he's less effective throwing the ball when he has to make decisions quickly in the pocket. He can be forced into some bad mistakes. Young had his best success running the ball when teams blitzed him or failed to account for him with an extra man. The best way to keep him from beating you with his legs or his arm is to play zone coverage and keep an extra player near the line of scrimmage, using a spy that is fast enough to keep up with him. Some teams have tried, but Young has run right by that player. ...

"Young doesn't seem as interested in taking off as much as he used to—maybe because he's taken some shots he didn't have to absorb in college. Young struggles most against zone coverages. In man-to-man situations, when the defender's back is to the ball, Young has a chance to exploit you. But if you're facing him and play with discipline, he's going to have a tougher time beating you. He's erratic with the deep ball, so that doesn't scare you a whole lot either."

OFFENSE

The Titans scored one touchdown or less in nine of 16 games last year. They were last in the NFL in red-zone offense.

Something needed to change, and coach Jeff Fisher decided it should start with the offensive coordinator. Mike Heimerdinger was hired to replace the fired Norm Chow.

In his second stint with the organization, Heimerdinger will emphasize more of a downfield offense and allow Young to take his shots deep. But the Titans won't stray from what Fisher likes best: running the football.

Quarterbacks Young threw almost twice as many interceptions (17) as touchdowns (9) last season, including the playoff game.

He wasn't the running threat he was as a rookie and, as a result, wasn't feared as much by defenses.

The Titans think Young will elevate his game under Heimerdinger, who helped turn Young's mentor, Steve McNair, into the NFL's co-MVP during the 2003 season.

Young and Heimerdinger spent the early part of the offseason working on little things, like Young's footwork in and out of the pocket. Then they turned their focus to changes in the offense, from verbiage to schemes.

The Titans focused on a short passing game with Chow, and Young at times felt the team was holding him back, even wondering if coaches trusted him. Heimerdinger will allow Young to show more of what he can do, which will either lift him to great heights or start to sink him.

Young's athleticism didn't leave with Chow, and the Titans want him to take advantage of his running abilities again. Last season, Young was limited, in part, because of a lingering quad injury. He'll be less hesitant to take off in Year 3.

Veteran Kerry Collins proved his worth last season when he filled in for Young. Collins still has a strong arm and is capable of stepping in at a moment's notice or with a week to prepare. The Titans want to win with Young, but are confident Collins can get the job done when called upon. **GRADE: C+**

Running backs LenDale White rushed for 1,110 yards in his second season but, just as important, he proved capable of staying healthy and playing in 16 games.

Durability and desire were two questions White had trouble shaking as a rookie, but he seems to have escaped them.

White is a bruising runner who can plow through the middle of the line and get tough yards. Oftentimes he finishes a play by dragging tacklers several yards down the field.

But the Titans would like a running back capable of providing more of a big-play element. White's role is simple: wear down defenses and get the tough yards.

The team hopes first-round pick Chris Johnson of East Carolina will be the playmaker the offense needs. They'll get him the ball by lining him up in the backfield and at receiver.

5-YEAR WINS TREND

NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	311.7	21
RUSHING	131.8	5
PASSING	179.9	27
SCORING	301	22
PUNT RETURNS	8.7	16
KICK RETURNS	21.1	27
RED ZONE TD %	36.4	32
TOTAL DEFENSE	291.6	5
AGAINST RUSH	92.4	5
AGAINST PASS	199.2	10
POINTS ALLOWED	297	8
INTERCEPTIONS	22	2t
SACKS	40	7
TURNOVER DIFF.	0	16

DAVID DUROCHIK FOR SN

Chris Henry was drafted in the second round in 2007, but he still has a lot to prove. Though Henry has great speed, he failed to consistently hit the right hole as a rookie and took way too many shots. **GRADE: C+**

Receivers » Patriots receiver Randy Moss scored 23 touchdowns on his own last year. Titans receivers combined for eight.

Improving on that was Priority No. 1 heading into the offseason.

Changing things for this fall, however, is easier said than done.

Justin Gage and Roydell Williams were Young's most reliable targets last year, and their chemistry should be even better this fall. Gage is tall and strong, and capable of going up to get the ball in traffic. Williams is more of a speedster who can stretch the field.

Newcomer Justin McCareins should provide a combination of both in his return to the team. McCareins excelled under Heimerdinger in his first stint with the team before being traded to the Jets. Brandon Jones has been injured and inconsistent in his first three NFL seasons, but he is talented enough to help out.

Meanwhile, wideouts Biren Ealy, Mike Williams, Chris Davis and Paul Williams will look to make a difference as well. A newcomer, fourth-round pick Lavelle Hawkins of California, will also be in the mix.

The Titans added former Falcons tight end Alge Crumpler to the fold to provide a big target in the middle of the field and in the red zone. If Crumpler is healthy, he should provide a big boost. Returning tight end Bo Scaife has good chemistry with Young and will see plenty of balls as well. Third-round pick Craig Stevens of Cal could make an impact as a blocker and pass catcher. **GRADE: C**

Offensive line » Some big changes took place here during the offseason.

Left guard Jacob Bell departed in free agency, signing with the Rams. Right guard Benji Olson retired after 10 seasons.

The Titans signed Jake Scott, a former Colt, to take Bell's place. Scott is big and strong, and the Titans believe he'll be even better equipped to take on some of the league's massive and physical defensive tackles.

Eugene Amano is in line to take over for Olson, who struggled with back problems late in his career. Amano is a smart player who doesn't get rattled under pressure and has played well in the past at guard and center.

In the middle of the line is 14-year veteran Kevin Mawae, who still moves well and has been a steadying influence for Young in his first two seasons.

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		
QB	Vince Young	Kerry Collins
FB	Ahmard Hall	Casey Cramer
RB	LenDale White	Chris Johnson
WR	Justin Gage	Brandon Jones
WR	Roydell Williams	Justin McCareins
TE	Alge Crumpler	Bo Scaife
LT	Michael Roos	Daniel Loper
LG	Eugene Amano	Jason Murphy
C	Kevin Mawae	Leroy Harris
RG	Jake Scott	Enoka Lucas
RT	David Stewart	Daniel Loper
DEFENSE		
LDE	Jevon Kearse	William Hayes
LDT	Tony Brown	Antonio Johnson
RDT	Albert Haynesworth	Jason Jones
RDE	Kyle Vanden Bosch	Bryce Fisher
LOLB	David Thornton	Josh Stamer
MLB	Ryan Fowler	Stephen Tulloch
ROLB	Keith Bulluck	Stanford Keglar
RCB	Cortland Finnegan	Eric King
LCB	Nick Harper	Reynaldo Hill
FS	Michael Griffin	Vincent Fuller
SS	Chris Hope	Calvin Lowry
SPECIALISTS		
K	Rob Bironas	
P	Craig Hentrich	
KR	Chris Carr	
PR	Chris Carr	
LS	Ken Amato	

TITANS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

JIM BROWN / US PRESSWIRE

1 **George Webster** *(1967-72)*

One of the most feared linebackers in the NFL during his time; a dominant player who was first-team All-Pro on three occasions.

2 **Robert Brazile** *(1975-84)*

When Lawrence Taylor entered the NFL, some said he might be the next Robert Brazile (seven Pro Bowls). Enough said.

3 **Keith Bulluck** *(2000-present)*

Sideline-to-sideline player who consistently produces and never misses time. He was a first-team All-Pro in 2003.

» DRAFT REPORT GRADE ▸ C+

The Titans decided not to get Vince Young a receiver and instead grabbed the draft's most explosive running back in East Carolina's **Chris Johnson**. He has everything necessary to make an immediate impact in the NFL except for a big, thick build. Think Eagles RB Brian Westbrook, only with more speed. Johnson will contribute to the offense as a rookie. Both DL **Jason Jones** and DE **William Hayes** are athletic but raw. Each needs to improve his technique and become more consistent in order to make the transition from project to contributor. Tight end **Craig Stevens** is not an explosive receiver but looks very good as an all-around blocker and should help as a short-area receiver. Expect him to develop into Young's safety net. **Lavelle Hawkins** is a fast receiver who can provide a deep threat and has the ball-tracking skills to make tough over-the-shoulder catches. He struggles to run sharp routes and is a little stiff, however, which will hinder his ability to consistently get separation on short routes. Athletic LB **Stanford Keglar** can chase down plays in pursuit but does not produce consistently enough to project as more than a backup in the NFL. **Cary Williams** is an athletic cornerback with good size and excellent ball skills. He will need to adjust to the level of competition after playing his college ball in Division II but should eventually see time as a third corner.

JOHNSON ▸ RB

» 2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
1	24	Johnson, Chris	RB	5-11	200	East Carolina
2	23	Jones, Jason	DE	6-5	262	Eastern Michigan
3	22	Stevens, Craig	TE	6-5	254	California
4	4	Hayes, William	DE	6-3	260	Winston-Salem
4	27	Hawkins, Lavelle	WR	5-11	187	California
4	35	Keglar, Stanford	LB	6-2	239	Purdue
7	22	Williams, Cary	CB	6-1	185	Washburn

ROSTER

#	QUARTERBACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
5	Collins, Kerry	QB	6-5	245	12/30/1972	13	Penn State
3	Martin, Ingle	QB	6-2	220	08/15/1982	1	Furman
8	Thompson, Paul	QB	6-4	216	11/23/1983	0	Oklahoma
10	Young, Vince	QB	6-5	233	05/18/1983	2	Texas

#	OFFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
54	Amano, Eugene	C	6-3	310	08/01/1982	4	Southeast Missouri State
64	Harris, Leroy	C	6-3	302	06/06/1984	1	North Carolina State
70	Loper, Daniel	T	6-6	320	01/15/1982	2	Texas Tech
62	Lucas, Enoka	C	6-3	299	04/29/1984	0	Oregon
68	Mawae, Kevin	C	6-4	289	01/23/1971	14	LSU
69	Murphy, Jason	C	6-2	304	08/07/1982	0	Virginia Tech
66	Otto, Michael	T	6-5	308	07/24/1983	0	Purdue
71	Roos, Michael	T	6-7	315	10/05/1982	3	Eastern Washington
73	Scott, Jake	G	6-5	295	04/16/1981	4	Idaho
76	Stewart, David	T	6-7	318	08/28/1982	2	Mississippi State

#	RUNNING BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
40	Cain, Jeremy	RB	6-1	240	03/24/1980	3	Massachusetts
48	Cramer, Casey	RB	6-2	250	01/05/1982	4	Dartmouth
35	Ganther, Quinton	RB	5-9	214	07/15/1984	2	Utah
45	Hall, Ahmard	RB	5-11	242	11/13/1979	2	Texas
42	Henry, Chris	RB	5-11	230	06/06/1985	1	Arizona
25	White, LenDale	RB	6-1	235	12/20/1984	2	USC

#	RECEIVERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
85	Blakley, Dwayne	TE	6-4	257	08/10/1979	4	Missouri
83	Crumpler, Alge	TE	6-2	262	12/23/1977	7	North Carolina
17	Davis, Chris	WR	5-10	181	01/23/1984	1	Florida State
82	Ealy, Biren	WR	6-3	207	07/07/1984	1	Houston
12	Gage, Justin	WR	6-4	212	01/24/1981	5	Missouri
81	McCareins, Justin	WR	6-2	215	12/11/1978	7	Northern Illinois
19	Jones, Brandon	WR	6-1	212	10/06/1982	3	Oklahoma
85	Petrowski, Jamie	TE	6-4	250	07/12/1982	0	Indiana State
80	Scaife, Bo	TE	6-3	249	01/06/1981	3	Texas
44	Stephens, Leonard	TE	6-3	252	07/09/1978	1	Howard
18	Williams, Mike	WR	6-5	242	01/04/1984	3	USC
11	Williams, Paul	WR	6-1	205	12/02/1983	0	Fresno State
86	Williams, Roydell	WR	6-0	187	03/14/1981	3	Tulane

#	DEFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
98	Ball, Dave	DE	6-5	277	01/04/1981	3	UCLA
97	Brown, Tony	DT	6-3	285	09/29/1980	3	Memphis
77	Conover, Sean	DE	6-5	262	07/31/1984	2	Bucknell
94	Fisher, Bryce	DE	6-3	265	05/12/1977	7	Air Force
78	Ford, Jacob	DE	6-4	251	07/20/1983	0	Central Arkansas
92	Haynesworth, Albert	DT	6-6	320	06/17/1981	6	Tennessee
99	Johnson, Antonio	DT	6-3	300	12/08/1984	0	Mississippi State
90	Kearse, Jevon	DE	6-4	265	09/03/1976	9	Florida
99	Long, Rien	DT	6-6	300	08/07/1981	3	Washington State
67	Taylor, Eric	DT	6-2	309	12/14/1981	1	Memphis
93	Vanden Bosch, Kyle	DE	6-4	278	11/17/1978	6	Nebraska
96	Vickerson, Kevin	DT	6-5	305	01/08/1983	1	Michigan State
79	Winkler, Ulrich	DT	6-5	265	01/04/1984	0	None

#	DEFENSIVE BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
28	Carr, Chris	CB	5-10	180	04/30/1983	3	Boise State
26	Cole, Marquice	CB	5-10	195	11/13/1983	0	Northwestern
31	Finnegan, Cortland	CB	5-10	188	02/02/1984	2	Samford
22	Fuller, Vincent	S	6-1	190	08/03/1982	3	Virginia Tech
33	Griffin, Michael	S	6-0	202	01/04/1985	1	Texas
20	Harper, Nick	CB	5-10	182	09/10/1974	7	Fort Valley State
21	Hill, Reynaldo	CB	5-11	185	08/28/1982	3	Florida
24	Hope, Chris	S	6-0	208	09/29/1980	6	Florida State
30	King, Eric	CB	5-10	185	05/10/1982	3	Wake Forest
37	Lowry, Calvin	S	5-11	200	02/13/1983	2	Penn State
36	Mitchell, Shirdonya	CB	5-11	183	05/16/1982	1	Missouri
23	Nickey, Donnie	S	6-3	210	04/25/1980	5	Ohio State

#	LINEBACKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
56	Allred, Colin	LB	6-1	238	04/15/1983	1	Baylor
58	Amato, Ken	LB	6-2	245	05/18/1977	5	Montana State
53	Bulluck, Keith	LB	6-3	235	04/04/1977	8	Syracuse
49	Campbell, Kurt	LB	6-1	227	07/30/1982	0	Albany
51	Cordova, Jorge	LB	6-1	244	09/25/1981	2	Nevada
52	Fowler, Ryan	LB	6-3	250	05/20/1982	4	Duke
57	Stamer, Josh	LB	6-2	236	10/11/1977	5	South Dakota
50	Thornton, David	LB	6-2	225	11/01/1978	6	North Carolina
55	Tulloch, Stephen	LB	5-11	235	01/01/1985	2	North Carolina State

#	KICKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
2	Bironas, Rob	K	6-0	205	01/29/1978	3	Georgia Southern
15	Hentrich, Craig	P	6-3	213	05/18/1971	14	Notre Dame
4	Miller, Josh	P	6-4	255	07/14/1970	12	Arizona

▶ **JEFF FISHER,** *Head coach*

Mike Heimerdinger, off. coord.; **Jim Schwartz**, def. coord.; **Matt Burke**, def. asst.; **Earnest Byner**, running backs; **Chuck Cecil**, def. backs; **Marty Galbraith**, asst. special teams; **Fred Graves**, wide receivers; **Craig Johnson**, quarterbacks; **Alan Lowry**, special teams; **Dave McGinnis**, asst. head coach/linebackers; **Mike Munchak**, off. line; **Marcus Robertson**, asst. secondary; **Jim Washburn**, def. line; **John Zernhelt**, tight ends

The strength of the Titans' offensive line, however, is on the outside at tackle. They have two players with completely different styles, yet both are especially effective.

Left tackle Michael Roos is a great athlete with good feet who is also very smart. Right tackle David Stewart is more of a mauler with a mean streak. He sets the tone in physical games with a style that sometimes gets under his opponents' skin.

The Titans have depth with guard/center Leroy Harris, guard/tackle Daniel Loper and tackle Michael Otto. **GRADE: B**

DEFENSE

The Titans improved dramatically on defense last year. Their defensive line consistently pressured opposing quarterbacks, and took the pressure off the secondary in the process.

Even more important in the eyes of defensive coordinator Jim Schwartz was the team's ability to stop the run. For years the Titans have taken great pride in run defense, but after slipping in previous years, the attitude—and mindset—returned last season, and the entire unit fed off of it.

Defensive line » The Freak is back in Tennessee. But can he return to form?

Defensive end Jevon Kearse signed a two-year deal with the Titans and joins a star-studded defensive line that includes two Pro Bowlers in end Kyle Vanden Bosch and tackle Albert Haynesworth.

Vanden Bosch is the high-motor guy who sets the tone on defense, while Haynesworth is the nasty run-stuffer who was arguably the biggest reason the team made such an improvement last fall. The Titans think Kearse will benefit from their presence on the opposite side—he'll face mostly one-on-ones, which will free him up to get after the quarterback.

But questions remain about a knee that limited his snaps and production in Philadelphia, where he played four seasons after beginning his career with great success in Tennessee.

The Titans need Kearse to make a significant impact because they lost two significant contributors in free agency: defensive ends Antwan Odom (Bengals) and Travis LaBoy (Cardinals). The Titans are thin at tackle behind Haynesworth and the overachieving Tony Brown following the free-agent loss of Randy Starks (Dolphins).

At end, Bryce Fisher is in the mix after a quiet '07 campaign following a trade with Seattle.

OFFSEASON MOVES

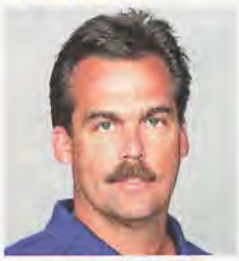
ADDITIONS:

TE **Alge Crumpler** *(FA/Falcons)*, G **Jake Scott** *(FA/Colts)*, WR **Justin McCareins** *(FA/Jets)*, TE **Dwayne Blakley** *(FA/Falcons)*, DE **Jevon Kearse** *(FA/Eagles)*, LB **Josh Stamer** *(FA/Bills)*, DB **Chris Carr** *(FA/Raiders)*

SUBTRACTIONS:

WR **Eric Moulds** *(FA)*, TE **Ben Troupe** *(FA/Buccaneers)*, DE **Travis LaBoy** *(FA/Cardinals)*, DE **Antwan Odom** *(FA, Bengals)*, TE **Ben Hartsock** *(FA/Falcons)*, LB **Gilbert Gardner** *(FA/Lions)*, DT **Randy Starks** *(FA/Dolphins)*, G **Jacob Bell** *(FA/Rams)*, LB **Robert Reynolds** *(FA)*, RB **Chris Brown** *(FA/Texans)*, CB **Chidi Iwuoma** *(FA)*, OL **Benji Olson** *(retired)*

INSIDE THE HEADSET



JEFF FISHER

Fisher's mindset hasn't changed since he first entered the league. He wants to win with defense, and on offense he wants to run the football with a hard-nosed ground attack. With a young quarterback in Vince Young, the Tennessee head coach is not very likely to shed his conservative approach.

HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL

FANTASY SPIN

http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football

WHITE

YOUNG

McCAREINS

Alge Crumpler is coming off his lowest yardage total since 2002, but he'll be a bargain in '08. He's a perfect safety blanket for Vince Young, much like he was for Michael Vick.

$ BUY » LenDale White, RB

SELL » Vince Young, QB

Z SLEEPER » Justin McCareins, WR

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/09	W	13-10	at Jacksonville Jaguars
09/16	L	20-22	Indianapolis Colts
09/24	W	31-14	at New Orleans Saints
10/07	W	20-13	Atlanta Falcons
10/14	L	10-13	at Tampa Bay Buccaneers
10/21	W	38-36	at Houston Texans
10/28	W	13-9	Oakland Raiders
11/04	W	20-7	Carolina Panthers
11/11	L	13-28	Jacksonville Jaguars
11/19	L	20-34	at Denver Broncos
11/25	L	6-35	at Cincinnati Bengals
12/02	W	28-20	Houston Texans
12/09	L	17-23	San Diego Chargers
12/16	W	26-17	at Kansas City Chiefs
12/23	W	10-6	New York Jets
12/30	W	16-10	at Indianapolis Colts

WON 10, LOST 6

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
White	303	1110	3.7	28	7
Brown	102	462	4.5	42	5
Young	93	395	4.2	21	3
Henry	31	119	3.8	24t	2
Jones	2	37	18.5	19	0
Davis	2	19	9.5	14	0
Hall	1	8	8.0	8	0
Barclay	1	3	3.0	3	0
Troupe	1	-1	-1.0	-1	0
Collins	3	-3	-1.0	-1	0
Hentrich	1	-8	-8.0	-8	0
Bell	1	-15	-15.0	-15	0
Williams	2	-17	-8.5	-6	0
TITANS	**543**	**2109**	**3.9**	**42**	**17**
OPPONENTS	369	1478	4.0	62t	11

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Gage	55	750	13.6	73	2
Williams	55	719	13.1	48	4
Scaife	46	421	9.2	26	1
Moulds	32	342	10.7	46	0
Jones	21	248	11.8	35t	2
White	20	114	5.7	15	0
Brown	19	128	6.7	16	0
Hartsock	12	138	11.5	27	0
Hall	9	60	6.7	11	0
Henry	6	53	8.8	18	0
Davis	5	38	7.6	13	0
Troupe	5	47	9.4	13	0
Barclay	2	13	6.5	7	0
Ealy	1	6	6.0	6	0
TITANS	**288**	**3077**	**10.7**	**73**	**9**
OPPONENTS	349	3428	9.8	69t	21

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Young	382	238	2546	9	17
Collins	82	50	531	0	0
TITANS	**464**	**288**	**3077**	**9**	**17**
OPPONENTS	569	349	3428	21	22

SACKS — **TITANS 40, OPPONENTS 30**

Vanden Bosch 12, Odom 8, Haynesworth 6, LaBoy 6, Brown 4, Finnegan 1, Fuller 1, Nickey 1, Thornton 1

The Titans are counting on two draft picks to make a difference at defensive end: second-rounder Jason Jones of Eastern Michigan and fourth-round choice William Hayes of Winston-Salem State. **GRADE: A-**

Linebackers » Outside linebacker David Thornton emerged as a big-time playmaker in his second season with the Titans, giving the team two speedy and productive outside 'backers.

For years, Bulluck had been a tone-setter, and that will continue this fall even though his opportunities became more limited while lining up behind Haynesworth and Vanden Bosch in '07.

Thornton and Bulluck are good tacklers who are also solid in coverage.

In the middle, Ryan Fowler is expected to be the starter. He proved to be a solid tackler whose physicality helped against the run last year, although his season was cut short because of a shoulder injury. Stephen Tulloch is expected to compete for the starting job again in camp. Tulloch isn't as big as Fowler, but he's instinctive and has made plays when given the opportunity.

The Titans signed former Bills linebacker Josh Stamer for depth at the position and drafted Stanford Keglar of Purdue in the draft's fourth round for help on special teams. **GRADE: B**

Secondary » A weakness in recent years, the secondary has now established itself as a dependable unit for the Titans.

Cornerbacks Cortland Finnegan and Nick Harper have similar styles of play that fit well with a defense so focused on stopping the run. They are physical corners who aren't afraid to stick their helmets into the fray, and their presence on the edge has helped in the run game.

At safety, veteran Chris Hope is expected back after having his 2007 season cut short because of a neck injury that later required surgery. He'll be paired with rising second-year player Michael Griffin, who has great range and also plays physical. The Titans believe that with a year under his belt and a better knowledge of the defense, Griffin will make a ton of plays this fall.

Vincent Fuller was the nickel back last year, but he'll have competition from former Raider Chris Carr among others. Safeties Calvin Lowry and Donnie Nickey provide depth and will help on special teams, while Reynaldo Hill will also be in the mix at cornerback. **GRADE: B**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Kicker Rob Bironas is coming off a Pro Bowl season in which he was pretty much automatic. Bironas displayed a strong leg on field goals and consistently hit the ball out of the end zone on touchbacks.

Punter Craig Hentrich is still going strong heading into his 15th NFL season, and was effective once again at pinning opponents inside the 20.

If there's an area where the Titans desperately need to improve, it's the return game, where they struggled mightily in 2007 following a season in which Pacman Jones provided excitement both on punts and kickoffs. With Jones suspended, the Titans weren't very good. Carr might change that. He was successful returning kickoffs in his three seasons with the Raiders and is expected to win that job, although Johnson will get a shot during his rookie season. While Carr wasn't as good at returning punts in Oakland, the Titans believe he'll improve in that area and expect him to win that job as well.

Ken Amato is a reliable long snapper who's been unlucky in the injury department. **GRADE: B**

BOTTOM LINE

The Titans won a lot of games they probably had no business winning last year, getting by even when their offense repeatedly failed them. While the team lost some players this offseason, the core returns and is ready for another run at the playoffs. A return trip is certainly possible, but if Young doesn't show significant improvement in Year 3, the Titans don't figure to be ready to become a surprise team like the 2007 Giants just yet.

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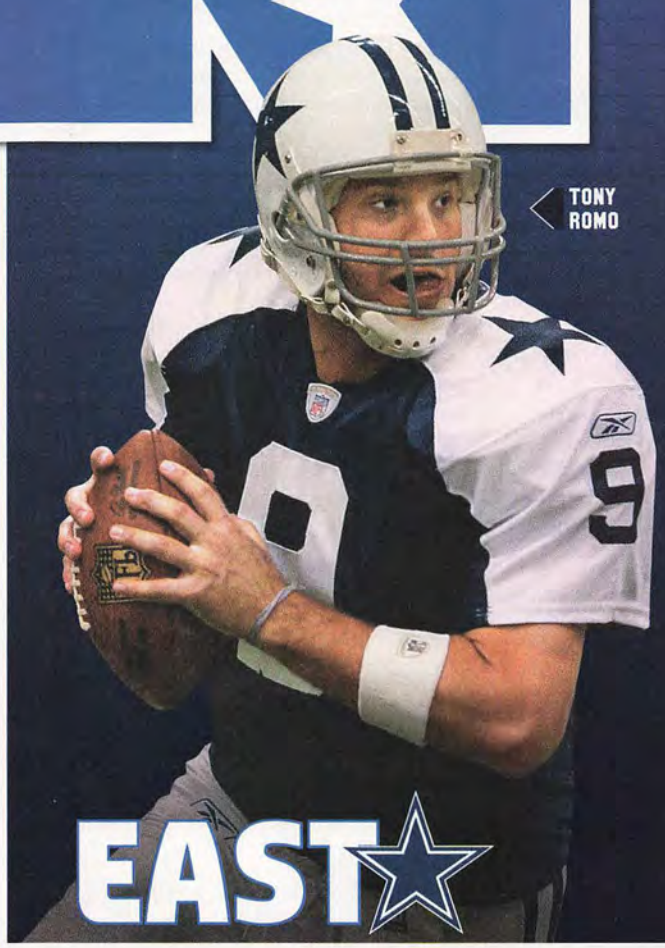
FINAL GRADE

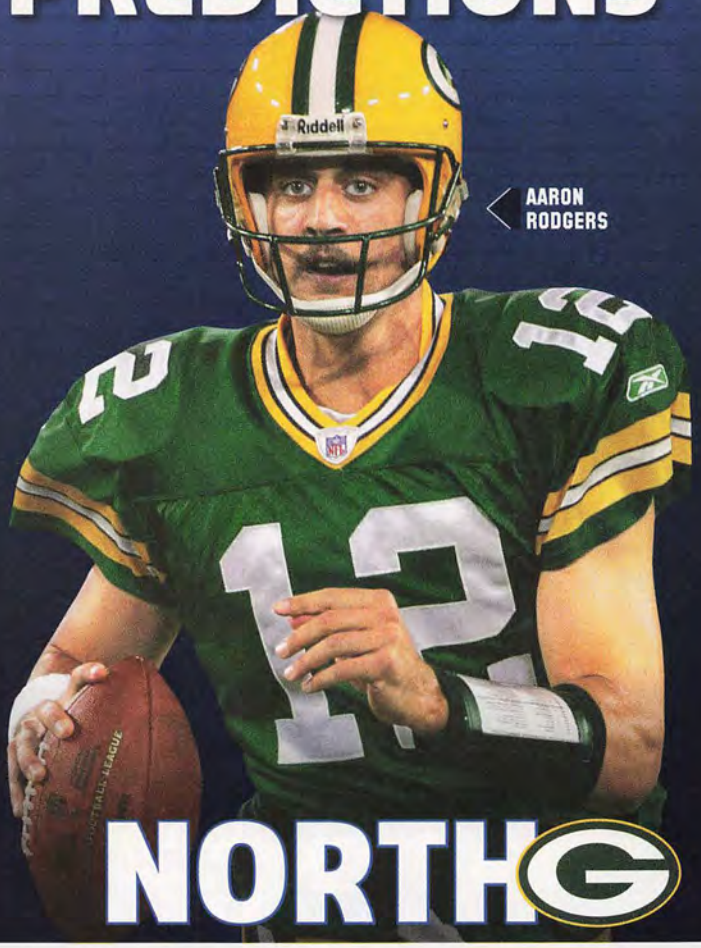
STOCK REPORT

STEADY

HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL

NFC PREDICTIONS


TONY ROMO


AARON RODGERS

EAST

1» COWBOYS 13-3
Loaded with talent, and they are motivated by recent playoff flops. Their offense is the best in the conference. Draft choice Felix Jones will pick up where Julius Jones left off. This team is headed for Tampa.

2» GIANTS 13-3
Defending Super Bowl champs will not surrender their crown easily. General manager Jerry Reese keeps upgrading talent, Eli Manning will keep improving and the pass rush is still nasty.

3» EAGLES 7-9
Playing in a tough division hurts them. Donovan McNabb and Brian Westbrook could still use more help on offense. Asante Samuel gives them a nice cover guy, but too bad he doesn't play offense.

4» REDSKINS 4-12
Jim Zorn may win eventually, but his first year as a head coach will be a struggle. He wants to throw, and quarterback Jason Campbell may not be quite ready. Defense is also a question mark.

NORTH

1» PACKERS 11-5
Brett Favre retired from a talented team. Aaron Rodgers has excellent receivers to work with, and the defense is solid. Mike McCarthy will coach this team to another division title.

2» BEARS 10-6
This will be a bounce-back season. Their post-Super Bowl blahs are over. Devin Hester will score enough big-play touchdowns to give the offense help, even if the quarterback play is shaky.

3» VIKINGS 9-7
Trendy pick to win the division, but the passing game is still shaky. Adrian Peterson is great, but he will have trouble improving on his rookie season. Playoffs must wait another year.

4» LIONS 3-13
The fade at the end of last season is a sign of things to come. Every other team in the division improved; the Lions did not, and it will show on the field. This franchise cannot seem to move forward.

(L TO R): ALBERT DICKSON / SN; MARK HUMPHREY / AP PHOTO

NFC CHAMPIONSHIP GAME

COWBOYS **OVER** PACKERS

WILD-CARD GAMES

GIANTS **OVER** SAINTS
SEAHAWKS **OVER** BEARS

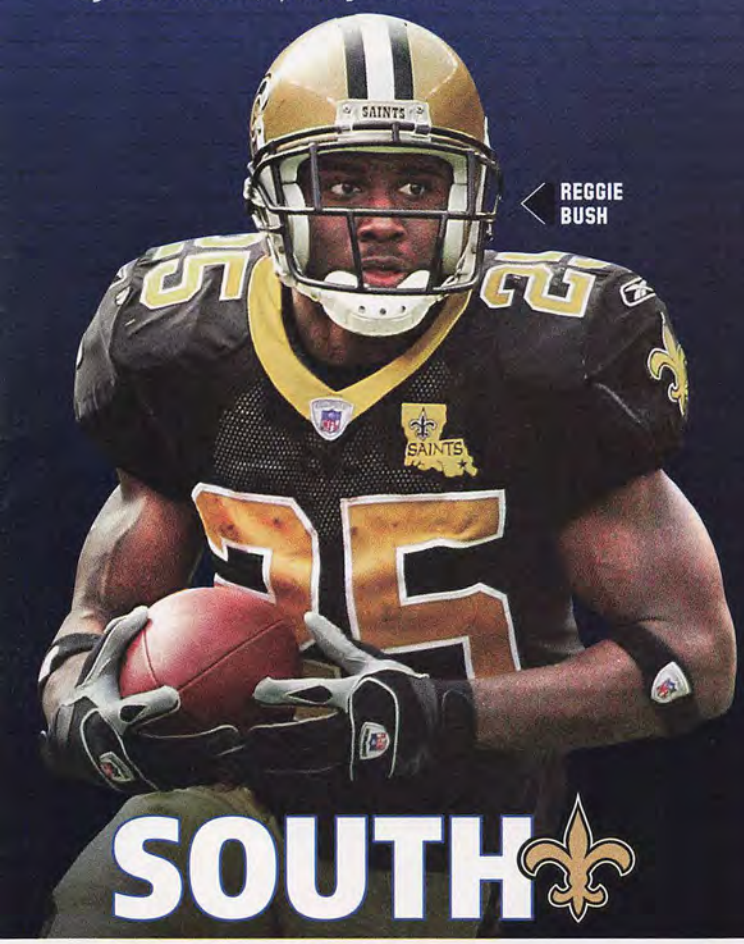
DIVISIONAL GAMES

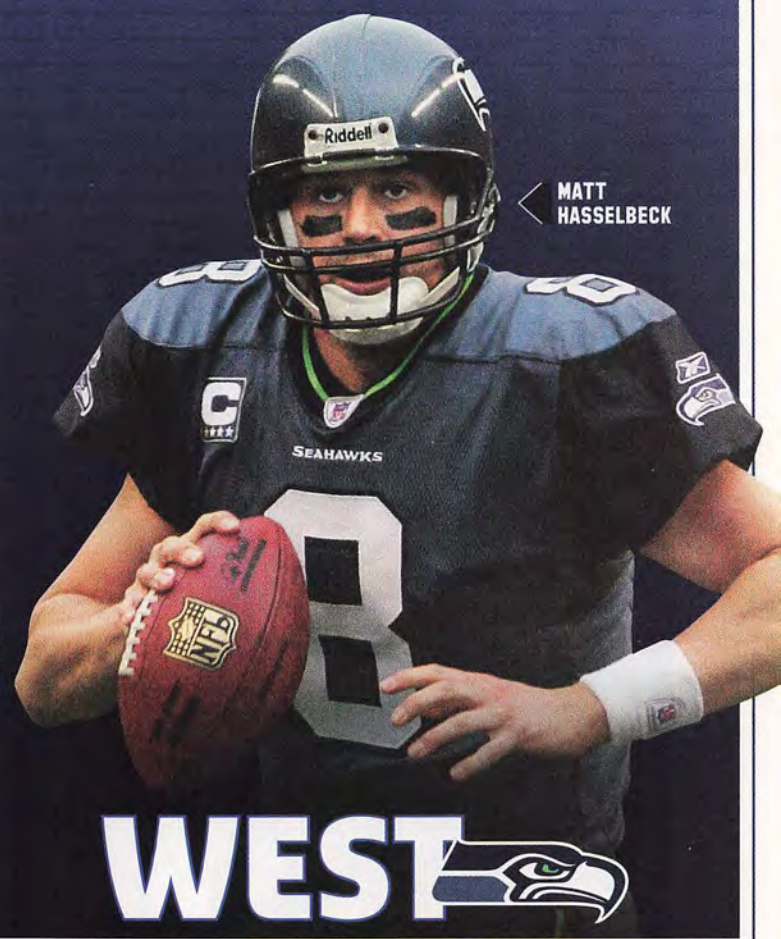
COWBOYS **OVER** GIANTS
PACKERS **OVER** SEAHAWKS

SUPER BOWL 43

CHARGERS **OVER** COWBOYS

By Clifton Brown, *Sporting News*





SOUTH

1» SAINTS 11-5

The additions of Jonathan Vilma and Sedrick Ellis will improve their defense. Drew Brees directs the short passing game as well as any quarterback. The Saints march back into the postseason.

2» BUCCANEERS 7-9

The health of Cadillac Williams is uncertain, and the running game could suffer. Team speed has improved with draft picks Aqib Talib and Dexter Jackson, but their aging defense will cost them.

3» PANTHERS 7-9

Excellent draft featuring RB Jonathan Stewart and OT Jeff Otah will improve the offense. But the defense no longer scares people, and too much of the offense still relies on Steve Smith.

4» FALCONS 1-15

Even if Matt Ryan becomes a Pro Bowl quarterback, it will not happen as a rookie. Michael Turner will find fewer holes to run through than he did in San Diego. A long season is in store.

WEST

1» SEAHAWKS 11-5

Mike Holmgren wanted a Super Bowl for his swan song. He will have to settle for the playoffs. They are good enough to win a weak division, but they cannot handle the NFC's elite.

2» RAMS 7-9

You have to figure the Rams will have fewer injuries than in '07. If Steven Jackson and Marc Bulger return to form, the offense will hum, and rookie Chris Long will be an All-Pro soon. Things are looking up.

3» CARDINALS 5-11

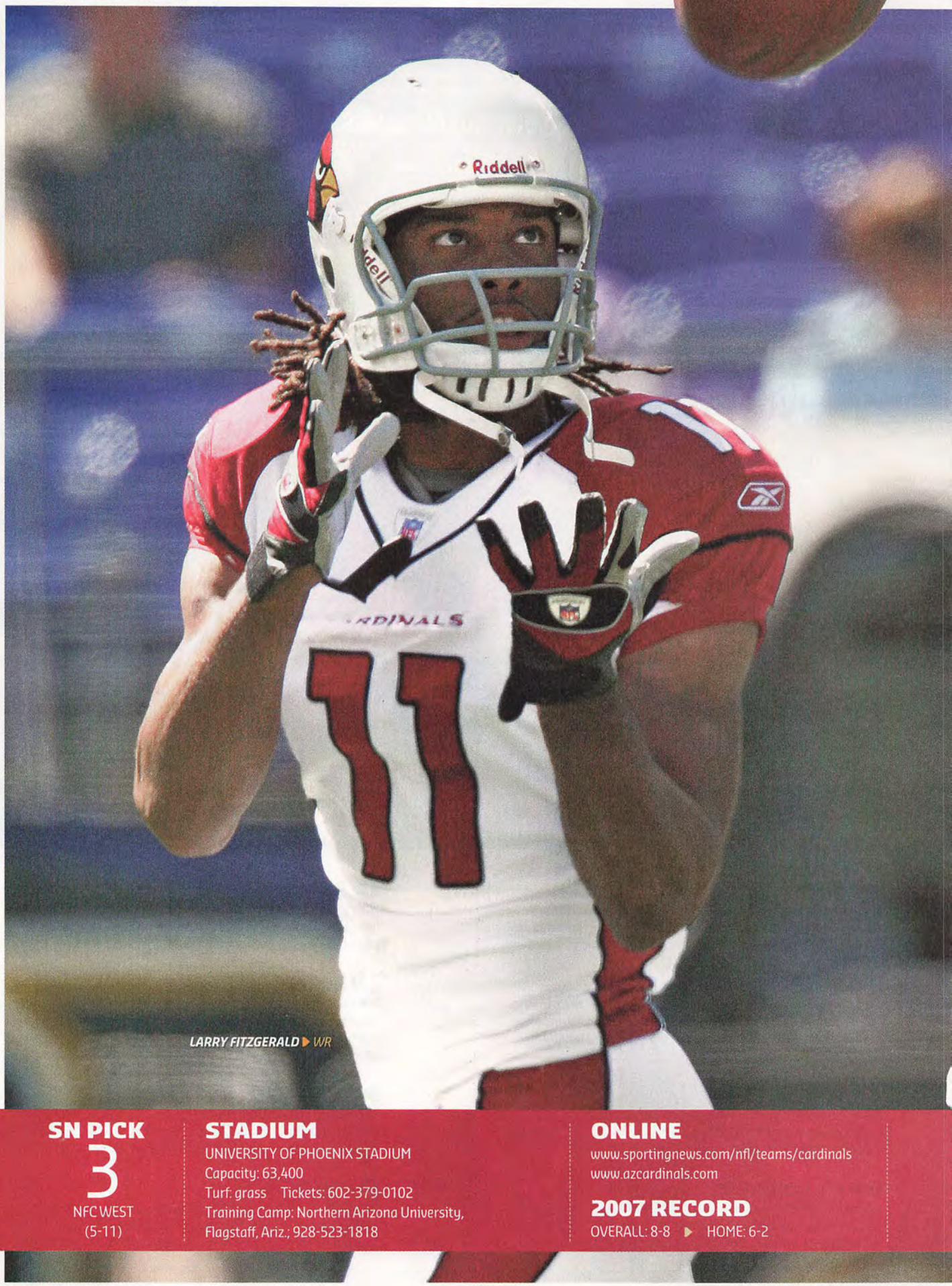
The offense lacks a home-run hitter, and the Cardinals need quarterback Matt Leinart to emerge as their leader. One year, Arizona will finally get it right. But it will not be this year.

4» 49ERS 3-13

New offensive coordinator Mike Martz was brought in to help Alex Smith, and to save Mike Nolan. Good luck with that. This group will not make anyone forget Joe Montana or Steve Young.

Draft reports by Russ Lande

JAY DROWNS / SN (2)



LARRY FITZGERALD ▶ WR

SN PICK
3
NFC WEST
(5-11)

STADIUM
UNIVERSITY OF PHOENIX STADIUM
Capacity: 63,400
Turf: grass Tickets: 602-379-0102
Training Camp: Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, Ariz.; 928-523-1818

ONLINE
www.sportingnews.com/nfl/teams/cardinals
www.azcardinals.com

2007 RECORD
OVERALL: 8-8 ▶ HOME: 6-2

(L TO R): BOB LEVERONE / SN; DAVID DUROCHIK FOR SN; HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL

ARIZONA CARDINALS

Young stars need to grow up and produce for Cardinals to be a factor

By Kent Somers, *Arizona Republic*

For most NFL teams, an 8-8 record produces frustration, not celebration. But in Arizona, where the franchise has produced only one winning record in 23 years, finishing .500 last year might mean a corner is about to be turned.

Or, as history would suggest, maybe the club is forever destined to drive with its blinker on.

There's no question the Cardinals were improved last year. Coach Ken Whisenhunt implemented a sense of discipline and accountability among the players that was missing in Dennis Green's three seasons.

But to achieve something more than mediocrity this year, the Cardinals must rid themselves of some past demons such as penalties, turnovers and the startling ability to commit a big mistake at the most inopportune time.

All of that contributed to six losses by a touchdown or less last season, including two wretched performances against the 49ers, who finished 5-11.

Still, progress was made, and the Cardinals could be on the brink of becoming a playoff contender.

BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

ANTREL ROLLE ▸ S

Antrel Rolle is moving from cornerback to safety, a position change that suits his skills. Rolle is a solid tackler with good instincts. He was a bit too stiff in the hips to be an exceptional corner, but he could make a great impact at free safety.

INSIDE THE HEADSET

KEN WHISENHUNT

Whisenhunt came to Arizona with a reputation for doing the unconventional, and he backed it up in his first year as coach. On 14 occasions last year, he went for it on fourth down, succeeding 12 times. Whisenhunt will gamble as much as any coach in the league.

OFFSEASON MOVES

ADDITIONS:

TE **Jerame Tuman** *(FA/Steelers)*, DE **Travis LaBoy** *(FA/Titans)*, P **Dirk Johnson** *(FA/Bears)*, DE **Bryan Robinson** *(FA/Bengals)*, LB **Matt Stewart** *(FA/Browns)*

SUBTRACTIONS:

DB **Terrence Holt** *(FA/Panthers)*, DE **Chris Cooper** *(FA/Seahawks)*, T **Oliver Ross** *(FA)*, TE **Tim Euhus** *(FA)*, DE **Rodney Bailey** *(FA)*, QB **Tim Hasselbeck** *(FA)*, LB **Brandon Johnson** *(FA/Bengals)*, DT **Ross Kolodziej** *(FA)*, P **Mitch Berger** *(FA)*, G **Keydrick Vincent** *(FA/Panthers)*, QB **Tim Rattay** *(FA)*, DB **Bhawoh Jue** *(FA)*, LB **Darryl Blackstock** *(FA/Bengals)*, DE **Calvin Pace** *(FA/Jets)*, WR **Bryant Johnson** *(FA/49ers)*

"I think we're getting to the point where some of our young leaders are stepping up and enforcing that mentality: 'This is how we work, this is how we're going to do it,'" Whisenhunt says. "Hopefully, we'll continue to build that team chemistry that is so important."

OFFENSE

Whisenhunt, a former offensive coordinator with the Steelers, believes in a physical running game, but he realized quickly last year that wasn't going to be the team's strength. He and offensive coordinator Todd Haley adjusted, and the Cardinals threw often and successfully. With receivers such as Anquan Boldin and Larry Fitzgerald, that's not going to change much this year, but there's no question the run game has to be more productive. It would help if the team could manage to take a lead into the fourth quarter more often, allowing them to consume time with the run game.

Quarterbacks » The starting job is Matt Leinart's to lose, and he could easily do that, especially since Kurt Warner returns as the backup. Warner passed for 27 touchdowns last year despite playing with a torn ligament in his non-throwing elbow for much of the season. It's a critical year for Leinart, who hasn't proven himself in two seasons. Not all of that is his fault, however. He struggled as a rookie under the failing regime of Green, and last year Leinart's season ended when he suffered a fractured collarbone in Week 5. Arizona's staff wants to see a stronger work ethic from Leinart. The coaches were on him last year about spending more time studying the playbook and video, and from all indications this offseason, Leinart is agreeable to that.

The organization has committed itself to Leinart, the 10th overall pick in the 2006 draft, but his first year under Whisenhunt was rocky. He shared time with Warner, who was called upon early to run the no-huddle offense. Leinart wasn't happy about it, but no one could argue with Warner's productivity. If Leinart struggles early this season, Whisenhunt will show some patience. One bad game won't earn him a spot on the bench. But if Leinart doesn't produce in the first month, Whisenhunt will have to turn to Warner. **GRADE: B**

Running backs » The Cardinals talked in the offseason about adding a back who possessed what Whisenhunt calls "home-run ability," but they passed on a chance in the draft to do so. Instead, Arizona will stay with Edgerrin James as the starter. James rushed for 1,222 yards last year, so that can't just be dismissed. He has good vision, excellent agility and is durable. However, James is not a breakaway threat. He had just four runs of 20 yards or more last year. While James is adept at turning a three-yard run into six, he doesn't break many tackles past the line of scrimmage and isn't going to run away from defensive backs.

The only notable addition to this position is rookie Tim Hightower, the club's fifth-round pick out of Richmond. He ran for 1,829 yards as a senior but isn't a burner, running the 40-yard dash in 4.6 seconds. While the coaching staff thinks he plays faster than that, Hightower doesn't appear to be a big-play threat. Fullback is an important position in this offense. Terrelle Smith is an excellent blocker, and coaches are high on his backup, Tim Castille. **GRADE: B**

Receivers » Boldin and Fitzgerald are as good a combination as there is in the league, but keeping them healthy enough to play together has been a challenge. Boldin has been injured in three of the past four seasons, while Fitzgerald has missed a game here and there. Together or separate, they can be devastating.

Neither has great speed, but both have big-play capability. Fitzgerald does it with his size, strength and ability to snatch the ball from the air, while Boldin has great hands and competitiveness. He is very quick and can change directions suddenly, which makes him a dangerous runner after the catch. Coaches will continue to move Boldin

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		
QB	Matt Leinart	Kurt Warner
FB	Terrelle Smith	Tim Castille
RB	Edgerrin James	Marcel Shipp
WR	Anquan Boldin	Jerheme Urban
WR	Larry Fitzgerald	Early Doucet
TE	Leonard Pope	Jerame Tuman
LT	Mike Gandy	Reggie Wells
LG	Reggie Wells	Elton Brown
C	Al Johnson	Lyle Sendlein
RG	Deuce Lutui	Elton Brown
RT	Levi Brown	Reggie Wells
DEFENSE		
DE	Antonio Smith	Calais Campbell
NT	Gabe Watson	Alan Branch
DE	Darnell Dockett	Kenny Iwebema
OLB	Chike Okeafor	Clark Haggans
ILB	Karlos Dansby	Monty Beisel
ILB	Gerald Hayes	Monty Beisel
OLB	Travis LaBoy	Bertrand Berry
LCB	Roderick Hood	Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie
FS	Antrel Rolle	Aaron Francisco
SS	Adrian Wilson	Aaron Francisco
RCB	Eric Green	Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie
SPECIALISTS		
K	Neil Rackers	
P	Dirk Johnson	
KR	Steve Breaston	
PR	Steve Breaston	
LS	Nathan Hodel	

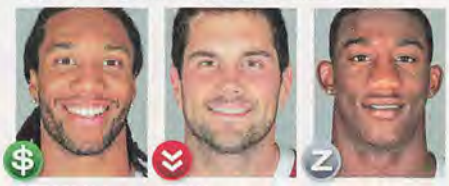
5-YEAR WINS TREND

NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	344.1	12
RUSHING	90.0	29
PASSING	254.1	5
SCORING	404	7
PUNT RETURNS	9.4	12
KICK RETURNS	22.7	15
RED ZONE TD %	68.0	3
TOTAL DEFENSE	330.2	17
AGAINST RUSH	97.9	9
AGAINST PASS	232.3	28
POINTS ALLOWED	399	27
INTERCEPTIONS	18	10t
SACKS	36	13t
TURNOVER DIFF.	-7	22t

FANTASY SPIN

http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football



FITZGERALD LEINART ROLLE

Kurt Warner is coming off his best season since 2001, but don't overpay for him. He'll be 37 this year, is injury-prone and has Matt Leinart ahead of him on the depth chart.

$ BUY » Larry Fitzgerald, WR

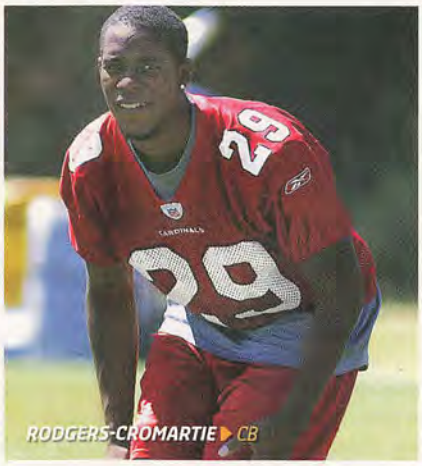
» SELL » Matt Leinart, QB

Z SLEEPER » Antrel Rolle, DB

HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL

DRAFT REPORT GRADE ▸ B-

With good size and explosiveness, **Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie** is a solid package at cornerback, but he is raw in terms of technique and consistency. He dominated the Senior Bowl, and with continued improvement, Rodgers-Cromartie will quickly become a top NFL corner. Defensive end **Calais Campbell** was an excellent second-round pick despite struggling at his workouts. He has the size, long arms, strength and athleticism to be a productive starter for the Cardinals. Receiver **Early Doucet** would have been a first-round pick had he come out after his junior season, but he struggled through an injury-plagued senior campaign. Doucet remains a great third-round value who should immediately contribute as a slot receiver and return man. Defensive ends **Kenny Iwebema** and **Chris Harrington** were good selections, as both show the technique and talent to make the rotation as rookies. Running back **Tim Hightower** has the tools to be a very good backup in the NFL, while **Brandon Keith** has the talent to play right tackle or guard and could surprise by developing into a starter.


RODGERS-CROMARTIE ▸ CB

2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
1	16	Rodgers-Cromartie, Dominique	CB	6-2	170	Tennessee State
2	19	Campbell, Calais	DE	6-8	280	Miami (FL)
3	18	Doucet, Early	WR	6-1	210	LSU
4	17	Iwebema, Kenny	DE	6-4	267	Iowa
5	14	Hightower, Tim	RB	6-1	225	Richmond
6	19	Harrington, Chris	DE	6-5	264	Texas A&M
7	18	Keith, Brandon	T	6-5	343	Northern Iowa

around the formation in order to create favorable matchups. There have been rumors about Boldin being traded, but that is unlikely. He has three years left on his contract, and his relationship with the team would have to really sour for a trade to happen.

If the Cardinals' run game improves, Fitzgerald should see more single coverage on the outside, and that's a matchup the Cardinals will try to exploit. But the position drops off after the dynamic duo. With Bryant Johnson gone to the 49ers via free agency, the No. 3 job is open. Rookie Early Doucet, a third-round pick out of LSU, could assume the role. Jerheme Urban and Sean Morey filled in some there last year, but neither claimed the job.

The tight end position should be solid with Leonard Pope as the starter and Ben Patrick, Jerame Tuman and Troy Bienemann competing for backup slots. **GRADE: A**

Offensive line The starting lineup returns intact, and coaches are expecting considerable improvement this year. This is a group that improved as the season progressed. The key will be the development of the right side, which features guard Deuce Lutui and tackle Levi Brown. Lutui is entering his third season and needs to give the club some consistency. He can be a devastating run blocker and moves well for a man his size. Brown, the fifth overall pick last year, had a rocky rookie season, partly because of a high ankle injury suffered early in the year. He was solid in the final weeks, however, and should be a mainstay on the right side.

Left tackle Mike Gandy played surprisingly well last season. He showed better quickness than expected, and not many defensive ends gave him trouble. Left

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE *(an opponent breaks down the Cardinals)*

"There's no doubt they have improved. The offensive line has improved, but they still need some pieces. The passing game is still elite. The run game was better last year, but they still need a legitimate change-of-pace back, a dynamic back. It's a one-man gang, and it's obvious Edgerrin James is on the downslide. Edgerrin can still play, but he needs help more than ever. He's probably got two solid years left where he can get 1,100, 1,200 yards, then he's going to drop down to 700. If they get a special back and a true blocking tight end, I think the offense will really be dynamic. ...

"On defense, they are still not a very talented front seven, but they have some talented pieces. Karlos Dansby is obviously a talent. (Darnell) Dockett has really, really grown up. Of course, everyone has finally realized that Antrel Rolle is a safety and not a corner. ...

"I really believe that (defensive coordinator) Clancy (Pendergast) did a sound, thorough job with that defense last year. They are not as much of a risk-taking, gambling defense as opposed to his early years there. He's improved."

RICK SCUTERI / US PRESSWIRE

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1	@ San Francisco	SEPT. 7	4:15
WEEK 2	Miami	SEPT. 14	4:15
WEEK 3	@ Washington	SEPT. 21	1:00
WEEK 4	@ New York Jets	SEPT. 28	1:00
WEEK 5	Buffalo	OCT. 5	4:15
WEEK 6	Dallas	OCT. 12	4:15
WEEK 7	OPEN DATE		
WEEK 8	@ Carolina	OCT. 26	1:00
WEEK 9	@ St. Louis	NOV. 2	1:00
WEEK 10	San Francisco	NOV. 10	8:30
WEEK 11	@ Seattle	NOV. 16	4:05
WEEK 12	New York Giants	NOV. 23	4:15
WEEK 13	@ Philadelphia	NOV. 27	8:15
WEEK 14	St. Louis	DEC. 7	4:15
WEEK 15	Minnesota	DEC. 14	4:05
WEEK 16	@ New England	DEC. 21	1:00
WEEK 17	Seattle	DEC. 28	4:15

SCORE — W L

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

guard Reggie Wells is the group's most consistent performance, and center Al Johnson isn't far behind.

The depth is much better than in past years. Elton Brown started games at guard and tackle in 2007 and played well. Backup center/guard Lyle Sendlein was a great find as a rookie free agent last year and could be a starter one day. **GRADE: B-**

DEFENSE

The Cardinals called themselves a 4-3 team throughout last season, but they weren't. The 3-4 was their base scheme, although they often morphed into a 4-3 during nickel situations. It's a multiple scheme with a lot of variations, and defensive coordinator Clancy Pendergast isn't afraid to use all of them. The unit played well last year until injuries took a toll at midseason, exposing a startling lack of depth. The Cardinals think they've addressed those concerns for the 2008 season.

Defensive line This unit's effectiveness will be determined by the guys in the middle, nose tackles Gabe Watson and Alan Branch. Watson will miss training camp after suffering a fractured kneecap on a treadmill in April but should be ready by September. It was bad luck for Watson, who showed great improvement last season. Branch, a second-round pick in 2007, needs to prove he was worthy of that status. He has the physical tools to be dominant, but needs a considerable amount of technique work. The Cardinals need him to come through, given Watson's questionable status.

THE BOOK ON ... ANQUAN BOLDIN *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"He's got the physical tools, but what sets him apart is his assertiveness and confidence. He accepts the challenge, and the tougher the challenge, the more demonstrative he becomes. He's a guy I would want to build around. He expects a lot out of himself, and he expects the guys around him to match his intensity.

"I think his greatest physical asset, besides his ability to catch, is he's got great lower-body strength and great quickness. He plays faster than he times. He has great hands and great ball skills. Playing quarterback (in high school and college) helped him, too. He handles the ball easily. The ball was not anything unique to him.

"When you defend him, I think he's a guy like Michael Jordan. You say, 'Hey, he's going to get his; we just don't want him to kill us.' You look at the great ones and they were going to get theirs. You try to limit them. You are not going to extinguish him. You just try to limit how bad he hurts you."

CARDINALS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1 Dale Meinert *(1958-67)*

A vicious tackler who played eight seasons for the Cardinals and was selected to the Pro Bowl three times. He started his pro career as a guard in Canada.

2 Bill Koman *(1959-67)*

An outside linebacker, he played 120 straight games, missing only one in eight seasons. He made the Pro Bowl twice.

3 Eric Hill *(1989-97)*

Physical and fearless, Hill was an intimidating force in the middle for the Arizona Cardinals. He averaged 100-plus tackles in nine seasons with the team.

Left end Darnell Dockett made the Pro Bowl as an alternate last year and was a devastating force in the first half of the season. He had eight sacks in the first eight games but appeared to wear down as the season progressed, with only one sack the rest of the way. Part of that, however, can be attributed to injury problems. To compensate for the loss of others, Dockett took more snaps at tackle as the season progressed, and it was hard for him to use his speed as a rusher from that position. Right end Antonio Smith is steady and reliable.

The Cardinals do have some depth up front. The hope is that rookies Calais Campbell, a second-round pick, and Kenny Iwebema (fourth round), help the team in a rotation that keeps Smith and Dockett fresh for the end of the year. Veteran Bryan Robinson can play the nose tackle and defensive end. Travis LaBoy, a free-agent signee from Tennessee, will rush off the edge in nickel situations. **GRADE: C**

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/10	L	17-20	at San Francisco 49ers
09/16	W	23-20	Seattle Seahawks
09/23	L	23-26	at Baltimore Ravens
09/30	W	21-14	Pittsburgh Steelers
10/07	W	34-31	at St. Louis Rams
10/14	L	10-25	Carolina Panthers
10/21	L	19-21	at Washington Redskins
11/04	L	10-17	at Tampa Bay Buccaneers
11/11	W	31-21	Detroit Lions
11/18	W	35-27	at Cincinnati Bengals
11/25	L	31-37	San Francisco 49ers
12/02	W	27-21	Cleveland Browns
12/09	L	21-42	at Seattle Seahawks
12/16	L	24-31	at New Orleans Saints
12/23	W	30-27	Atlanta Falcons
12/30	W	48-19	St. Louis Rams

WON 8, LOST 8

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
James	324	1222	3.8	27	7
Arrington	26	78	3.0	12	0
Leinart	11	42	3.8	20	0
Shipp	15	41	2.7	14	1
Warner	17	15	0.9	9	1
Boldin	1	14	14.0	14	0
Morey	1	13	13.0	13	0
Breaston	2	8	4.0	10	0
Rattay	2	5	2.5	5	0
Smith	1	3	3.0	3	0
Berger	1	0	0.0	0	0
Hasselbeck	1	-1	-1.0	-1	0
CARDINALS	**402**	**1440**	**3.6**	**27**	**9**
OPPONENTS	407	1567	3.9	75	13

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Fitzgerald	100	1409	14.1	48t	10
Boldin	71	853	12.0	44t	9
Johnson	46	528	11.5	30	2
Arrington	29	241	8.3	32	1
James	24	204	8.5	26	0
Pope	23	238	10.3	31	5
Urban	22	329	15.0	42	2
Breaston	8	92	11.5	22	0
Morey	8	131	16.4	62	0
Bienemann	7	46	6.6	13	1
Patrick	7	73	10.4	21	2
Smith	7	59	8.4	16	0
Shipp	4	25	6.3	9	0
CARDINALS	**356**	**4228**	**11.9**	**62**	**32**
OPPONENTS	361	3958	11	74t	26

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Warner	451	281	3417	27	17
Leinart	112	60	647	2	4
Rattay	27	15	164	3	3
CARDINALS	**590**	**356**	**4228**	**32**	**24**
OPPONENTS	570	361	3958	26	18

SACKS **CARDINALS 36, OPPONENTS 24**

Dockett 9, Pace 6.5, Smith 5.5, Hayes 4, Dansby 3.5, Blackstock 3, Berry 2.5, Tafoya 2

Linebackers Three free-agent signings have turned this group from a weakness into a strength, provided some aging veterans stay healthy. Outside linebackers Bertrand Berry and Chike Okeafor missed significant portions of last season with injuries,

BOB LEVERONE / SN

and the pass rush suffered as a result. Both players were in good shape over the summer and are on track to return. But both also are over 30. Recognizing that, the club shored up the unit by signing Clark Haggans and LaBoy. Haggans, a former Steeler, and LaBoy have proven pass rush skills and give Pendergast some flexibility in designing game plans. LaBoy is more of an end and will play that spot when the team moves from its base 3-4 set to a 4-3 alignment in nickel situations.

Inside, the team is set with Gerald Hayes on the strong side and Karlos Dansby at the weak. Hayes is a workhorse who can deliver a blow when playing the run, and Dansby is versatile enough to blitz, cover a running back or drop into coverage. **GRADE: B**

Secondary The biggest changes this season are the move of Antrel Rolle from cornerback to safety and the selection of cornerback Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie in the first round of the draft. Free safety should be a better fit for Rolle, the eighth overall pick in the 2005 draft. He is an excellent tackler and has good instincts, two attributes that should make his transition to safety a smooth one. Rolle could move to cover the slot in nickel situations with backup free safety Aaron Francisco taking over deep.

The starting cornerbacks, Roderick Hood and Eric Green, are back, but both will be pushed by Rodgers-Cromartie, who has great speed. Leading this whole group is strong safety Adrian Wilson, who is passionate about proving (again) that he's among the best in the NFL. The entire defense is designed around his skills, and it's no coincidence that the group's performance dropped when Wilson was lost for the season with a heel injury in the ninth game. Wilson often plays near the line of scrimmage as a linebacker and is equally adept at rushing the passer and playing the run. **GRADE: B**

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Cardinals need to get more out of the guys who put their feet on the ball. Arizona ranked last in the NFL in net punt average last year, mainly because of departed punter Mike Barr's struggles. But the coverage teams need improvement, too. The punting job is open, with veteran Dirk Johnson the favorite to win the job.

Kicker Neil Rackers has been inconsistent the past two seasons and hasn't come through in the clutch often enough. His performance suffered last season when his regular holder, punter Scott Player, was cut near the end of training camp. Rackers has a strong leg and his onside kicks are things of beauty. Long snapper Nathan Hodel is steady and reliable. Steve Breaston, a rookie last year, bolstered both the punt and kick return teams. He has big-play ability, as evidenced by his punt return for a touchdown last season—the first time a Cardinal had done that since 1993. **GRADE: C**

BOTTOM LINE

Whisenhunt and his staff have had a year to implement their system, adjusting their schemes to fit personnel and vice versa. Players are clear about what the coaches want, and that familiarity should reduce the number of mistakes on Sundays. The key to the season will be the development of young players such as Leinart, Branch and Rolle. The depth has improved a little, which should help over the second half of the season. But the schedule is more difficult, and it's imperative the club avoid its usually slow start.

77

FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT

UP

ROSTER

#	QUARTERBACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
7	Leinart, Matt	QB	6-5	230	05/11/1983	2	USC
2	St. Pierre, Brian	QB	6-3	230	11/28/1979	1	Boston College
13	Warner, Kurt	QB	6-2	222	06/22/1971	10	Northern Iowa

#	OFFENSIVE LINE	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
61	Brown, Elton	G	6-5	332	05/22/1982	2	Virginia
75	Brown, Levi	T	6-5	322	03/16/1984	1	Penn State
69	Gandy, Mike	T	6-4	310	01/03/1979	6	Notre Dame
50	Johnson, Al	C	6-5	305	01/27/1979	4	Wisconsin
76	Lutui, Deuce	G	6-4	328	05/05/1983	2	USC
64	Peters, Scott	C	6-3	312	11/23/1978	1	Arizona State
63	Sendlein, Lyle	C	6-2	300	03/16/1984	1	Texas
68	Vallejo, Elliot	T	6-7	312	05/17/1984	0	California-Davis
74	Wells, Reggie	G	6-4	305	11/03/1980	5	Clarion

#	RUNNING BACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
28	Arrington, J.J.	RB	5-9	212	01/23/1983	3	California
33	Baylark, Steve	RB	6-0	224	07/28/1983	0	Massachusetts
46	Castille, Tim	RB	5-11	234	05/29/1984	0	Alabama
32	James, Edgerrin	RB	6-0	220	08/01/1978	9	Miami (FL)
31	Shipp, Marcel	RB	5-11	224	08/08/1978	6	Massachusetts
45	Smith, Terrelle	RB	6-0	250	03/12/1978	8	Arizona State

#	RECEIVERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
83	Bienemann, Troy	TE	6-5	253	02/18/1983	1	Washington State
81	Boldin, Anquan	WR	6-1	217	10/03/1980	5	Florida State
15	Breaston, Steve	WR	6-0	189	08/20/1983	1	Michigan
18	Cornelius, Jemalle	WR	5-11	185	08/10/1984	0	Florida
11	Fitzgerald, Larry	WR	6-3	226	08/31/1983	4	Pittsburgh
48	Hodel, Nathan	TE	6-2	238	11/12/1977	6	Illinois
86	Merritt, Ahmad	WR	5-10	195	02/05/1977	3	Wisconsin
87	Morey, Sean	WR	5-11	193	02/26/1976	6	Brown
89	Patrick, Ben	TE	6-3	254	08/23/1984	1	Delaware
82	Pope, Leonard	TE	6-8	258	09/10/1983	2	Georgia
10	Rector, Jamaica	WR	5-10	183	08/10/1981	2	Northwest Missouri St.
49	Shor, Alex	TE	6-7	250	01/29/1983	0	Syracuse
84	Tuman, Jerame	TE	6-4	253	03/24/1976	9	Michigan
85	Urban, Jerheme	WR	6-3	212	11/26/1980	3	Trinity (TX)

#	DEFENSIVE LINE	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
92	Berry, Bertrand	DE	6-3	264	08/15/1975	10	Notre Dame
78	Branch, Alan	DT	6-5	331	12/29/1984	1	Michigan
90	Dockett, Darnell	DT	6-4	285	05/27/1981	4	Florida State
55	LaBoy, Travis	DE	6-3	260	08/20/1981	4	Hawaii
56	Okeafor, Chike	DE	6-5	247	03/27/1976	8	Purdue
97	Robinson, Bryan	DE	6-4	304	06/22/1974	11	Fresno State
95	Schobel, Bo	DE	6-5	264	03/24/1981	4	TCU
94	Smith, Antonio	DE	6-4	280	10/21/1981	4	Oklahoma State
96	Tafoya, Joe	DE	6-4	258	09/06/1978	6	Arizona
98	Watson, Gabe	DT	6-3	332	09/24/1983	2	Michigan

#	DEFENSIVE BACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
27	Adams, Michael	CB	5-8	181	06/17/1985	1	Louisiana-Lafayette
41	Bain, Travarous	CB	6-0	182	10/15/1983	0	Hampton
20	Brown, Ralph	CB	5-10	185	09/16/1978	8	Nebraska
35	Celestin, Oliver	S	6-0	207	02/25/1981	4	Texas Southern
47	Francisco, Aaron	S	6-2	207	07/05/1983	3	Brigham Young
25	Green, Eric	CB	5-11	194	03/16/1982	3	Virginia Tech
26	Hood, Roderick	CB	5-11	198	10/03/1981	5	Auburn
23	Minter, DeMario	CB	5-11	190	02/20/1984	0	Georgia
21	Rolle, Antrel	CB	6-0	208	12/16/1982	3	Miami (FL)
22	Ware, Matt	CB	6-2	214	12/02/1982	4	UCLA
24	Wilson, Adrian	S	6-3	230	10/12/1979	7	North Carolina State

#	LINEBACKERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
52	Beisel, Monty	LB	6-3	244	08/20/1978	7	Kansas State
58	Dansby, Karlos	LB	6-4	250	11/03/1981	4	Auburn
53	Haggans, Clark	LB	6-4	243	01/10/1977	8	Colorado State
54	Hayes, Gerald	LB	6-1	249	10/10/1980	4	Pittsburgh
57	Holloway, David	LB	6-2	234	12/04/1983	0	Maryland
51	Stewart, Matt	LB	6-3	236	08/31/1979	6	Vanderbilt

#	KICKERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
9	Johnson, Dirk	P	6-0	205	06/01/1975	6	Northern Colorado
1	Rackers, Neil	K	6-1	202	08/16/1976	8	Illinois

▶ **KEN WHISENHUNT,** *Head coach*

Todd Haley, off. coord.; **Clancy Pendergast**, def. coord.; **Russ Grimm**, asst. head coach/off. line; **Kevin Spencer**, special teams; **Ron Aiken**, def. line; **Teryl Austin**, def. backs; **Maurice Carthon**, running backs; **Rick Courtright**, asst. def. backs; **Bill Davis**, linebackers; **Freddie Kitchens**, tight ends; **Mike Miller**, wide receivers; **Matt Raich**, def. asst.; **Jeff Rutledge**, quarterbacks

ATLANTA FALCONS

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE

(an opponent breaks down the Falcons)

"The Falcons have to get the quarterback situation taken care of before they can move forward. Since they got the back from San Diego (Michael Turner), at least they now have a one-two punch at running back with Turner and Jerious Norwood, but the quarterback play is key. They have to rebuild the offensive line and get some stability up front. They are going to need somebody to step up at wide receiver alongside Roddy White, who had a breakout year last season.

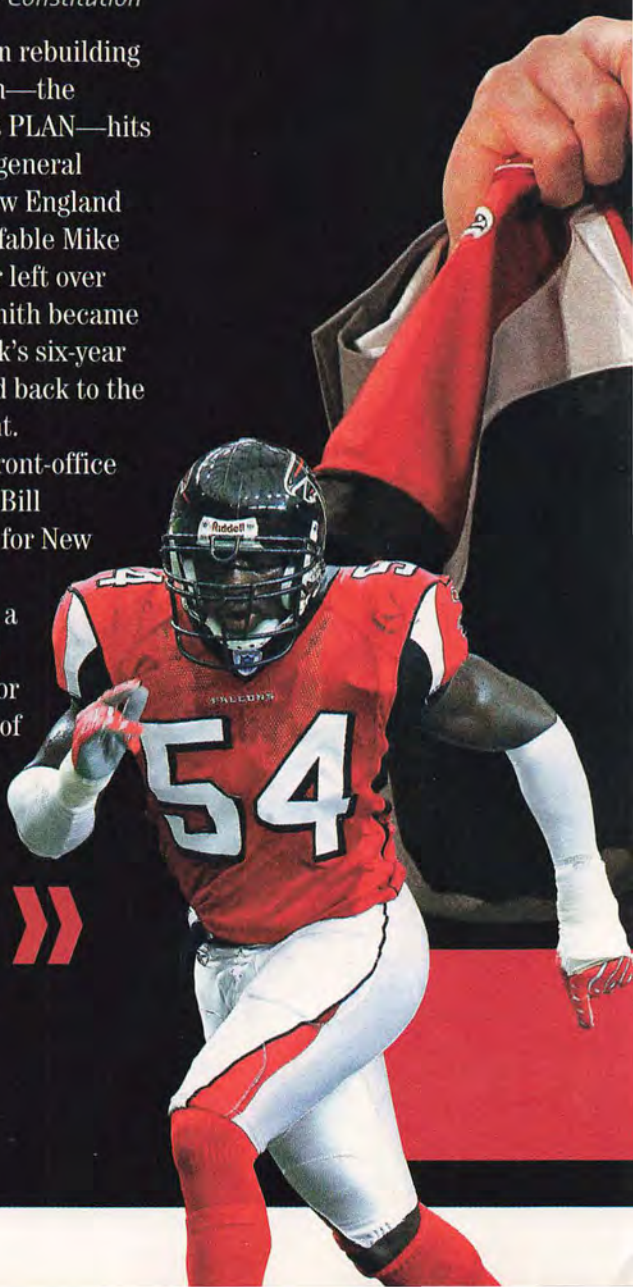
"Defensively, they have a new head coach who is coming in with his own defensive style. The new defensive end (Jamaal Anderson) they got last year, he's just a guy. They wasted some money on him. He didn't have a sack last year. You'd think he'd at least trip up and slip into one sack. But the key is to get a quarterback and then see if they need some more help."

Ryan's hope is that Falcons' owner isn't just firing another Blank

By D. Orlando Ledbetter, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

Seems like the Falcons have been rebuilding in perpetuity. The latest version—the DIMITROFF & SMITH MASTER PLAN—hits the field in 2008. After plucking new general manager Thomas Dimitroff off the New England Patriots' tree and pairing him with affable Mike Smith, the Falcons blew up the roster left over from the McKay/Mora/Petrino era. Smith became the fourth head coach in Arthur Blank's six-year ownership tenure after Petrino bolted back to the college ranks after a 13-game pro stint.

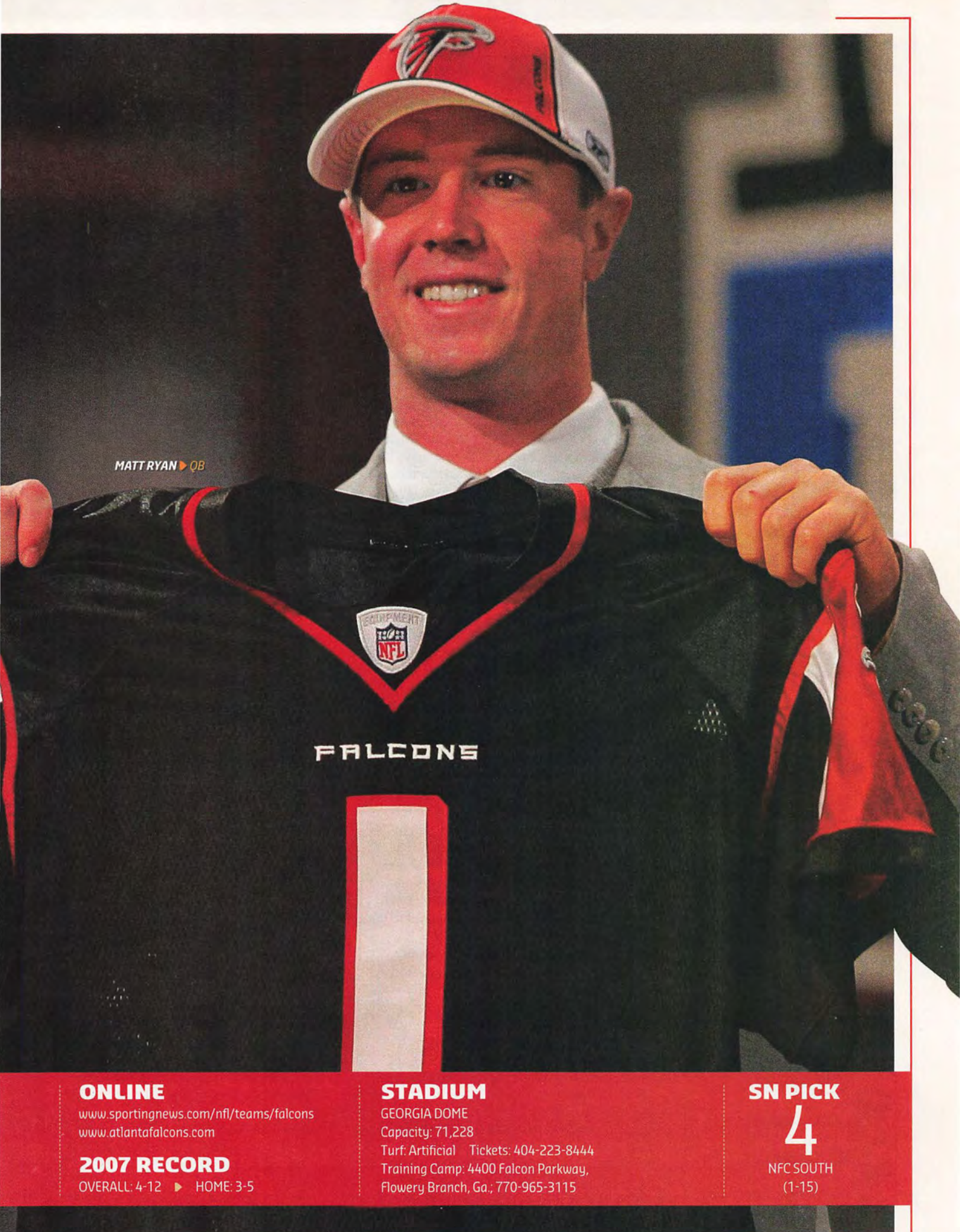
The Falcons are hoping their new front-office tandem works out somewhat like the Bill Belichick-Scott Pioli partnership has for New England. They'd take the franchise's first back-to-back winning seasons as a start. Dimitroff and Smith decided to rebuild from scratch. The plan calls for the Falcons to begin with the middle of both units.



BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

STEPHEN NICHOLAS ▸ OLB

The Falcons tried to ease Nicholas into the starting lineup as a rookie, but a high ankle sprain nixed the plan. Nicholas is healed and ready to replace Demorrio Williams at weakside linebacker. He's an explosive hitter with big-play potential.



ONLINE

www.sportingnews.com/nfl/teams/falcons
www.atlantafalcons.com

2007 RECORD

OVERALL: 4-12 ▶ HOME: 3-5

STADIUM

GEORGIA DOME
Capacity: 71,228
Turf: Artificial Tickets: 404-223-8444
Training Camp: 4400 Falcon Parkway,
Flowery Branch, Ga.; 770-965-3115

SN PICK

4

NFC SOUTH
(1-15)

(L TO R): SCOTT CUNNINGHAM, JIM McISAAC / GETTY IMAGES

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 Detroit — SEPT. 7 | 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 2 @ Tampa Bay — SEPT. 14 | 4:05 — SCORE

WEEK 3 Kansas City — SEPT. 21 | 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 4 @ Carolina — SEPT. 28 | 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 5 @ Green Bay — OCT. 5 | 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 6 Chicago — OCT. 12 | 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 7 *OPEN DATE*

WEEK 8 @ Philadelphia — OCT. 26 | 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 9 @ Oakland — NOV. 2 | 4:15 — SCORE

WEEK 10 New Orleans — NOV. 9 | 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 11 Denver — NOV. 16 | 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 12 Carolina — NOV. 23 | 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 13 @ San Diego — NOV. 30 | 4:05 — SCORE

WEEK 14 @ New Orleans — DEC. 7 | 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 15 Tampa Bay — DEC. 14 | 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 16 @ Minnesota — DEC. 21 | 1:00 — SCORE

WEEK 17 St. Louis — DEC. 28 | 1:00 — SCORE

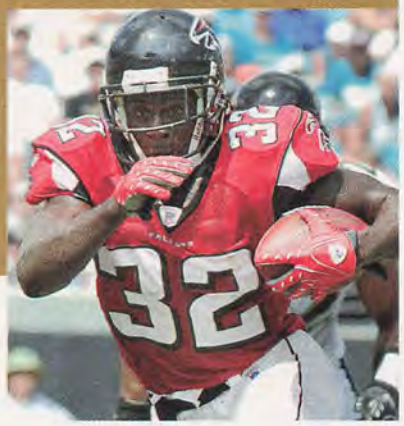
Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

THE BOOK ON ... JERIOUS NORWOOD *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"The Falcons have to find a way to get Jerious Norwood 15 to 20 touches a game. His sheer speed puts an incredible amount of stress on the defense. Norwood may not be ideal to run between the tackles, but that's what they signed Michael Turner to do. He's had to wait his turn behind Warrick Dunn and now must split carries with Turner. They have to come up with some schemes to get both of them on the field and resist labeling Norwood as a third-down back.

"I'm sure (offensive coordinator) Mike Mularkey can find a way to mix in his touches on first and second down; then the offense will be less predictable on third downs when he's on the field.

"Norwood has the potential to hit the home run at any time. Once he gets into the secondary, he's in a foot race that he's going to win."



DAVID DUROCHIK FOR SN

OFFENSE

Offensive coordinator Mike Mularkey will implement his "exotic smash-mouth" attack that is centered around a power running game. The vertical passing game will flow off of play-action fakes with a healthy mix of well-timed gadget plays. Before things get rolling and the unit is set to establish an identity, the Falcons must rebuild the offensive line under the guidance of longtime NFL assistant coach Paul Boudreau. In addition to revamping the line, the Falcons must find a few tight ends/H-backs who can execute in the run game.

Quarterbacks The Falcons turned the page on the Michael Vick chapter when they selected Boston College quarterback Matt Ryan with the third pick in April's draft. Chris Redman will start out as the No. 1, but will only keep the position warm for Ryan. As soon as Ryan is comfortable, expect to see him take over.

Redman, who had been out of the league since 2003 and was selling insurance in his hometown of Louisville, Ky., came to the forefront last season to win the job from Joey Harrington and the since-departed Byron Leftwich. Harrington is back but will have to hold off D.J. Shockley for the No. 3 position.

The Falcons liked Ryan's spunk and flare for the dramatic comeback. They also noted that he was 10-4 in "big" or rivalry games. He can make all of the throws at all levels. Ryan's high number of interceptions last season (19) wasn't a turnoff, either. In film review of Ryan's play, the Falcons counted 54 dropped or broken-up passes. Ryan completed 388 of 654 throws (59.3 percent) in his collegiate career. If his receivers had caught half (27) of the drops, his completion rate would have soared to 63.5 percent. **GRADE: C**

Running backs Warrick Dunn just couldn't scoot through traffic last year as easily as he did once in his career. He was released in the offseason, causing the Falcons to splurge on free-agent running back Michael Turner. After backing up LaDainian Tomlinson the last four years in San Diego, "The Burner" has landed a full-time gig. While with the Chargers, Turner showed his ability to run between the tackles and flashed his speed to go the distance. He is also adept at picking up the blitz and has decent hands coming out of the backfield. About the only question is whether can he hold up week-in and week-out while amassing 20 to 25 carries a game behind a revamped offensive line.

Jerious Norwood, a speedster, is suited for third-down duty but can carry the load for part of the game if Turner needs a couple of plays off. Norwood should be more of a threat in the passing game and can be used to create mismatches. Jason Snelling, a solid special-teamer, and rookie Thomas Brown will battle it out for the No. 3 duties. Snelling was a short-yardage ballcarrier late last season. At fullback, Ovie Mughelli remains the lead blocker and will rarely touch the football. **GRADE: B**

Receivers What has been long been a weakness is now considered

5-YEAR WINS TREND

NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	301.0	23
RUSHING	95.0	26
PASSING	206.0	18
SCORING	259	29
PUNT RETURNS	6.3	29
KICK RETURNS	24.7	6
RED ZONE TD %	39.5	29
TOTAL DEFENSE	355.5	29
AGAINST RUSH	127.1	26
AGAINST PASS	228.4	23
POINTS ALLOWED	414	29
INTERCEPTIONS	16	17t
SACKS	25	30
TURNOVER DIFF.	+4	10t

one of the team's strengths. Too bad former wide receivers coach George Stewart wasn't around to see all of his work with wide receiver Roddy White come to fruition last season. White finally developed into the 1,000-yard receiver the Falcons envisioned when they drafted him in the first round in 2005. Stewart put in countless hours with White before leaving when Jim Mora was fired. Last season's position coach, Paul Petrino, added the finishing touches on White, who is now clearly the team's top receiving threat.

Second-year man Laurent Robinson will fill the spot opposite White. He has top-flight speed and has refined his route-running, which should only get more polished under longtime NFL assistant Terry Robiskie, the new receivers coach. Michael Jenkins, who has developed into a solid No. 3 wideout, will make the difficult catch in traffic and is reliable on third down. But he'll have to hold off a challenge from rookie Harry Douglas.

The pass-catching corps is hoping to get a shot in the arm with the return of Brian Finneran, who missed the last two seasons with knee injuries. Veteran Joe Horn and Adam Jennings appear to be the odd men out. **GRADE: B**

Offensive line ›› This unit was a train wreck last season while working under a rookie NFL offensive line coach, Mike Summers. It gave up 47 sacks and averaged only 95 yards rushing per game after leading the league in that category the three previous seasons. The Falcons drafted left tackle Sam Baker from Southern California with the 21st pick of the first round. They hope that Baker has a Joe Thomas-like calming effect along the line of scrimmage. Perhaps the second-most important addition is line coach Boudreau, a veteran NFL aide who will not have credibility issues with the players. He's molded units together before and will be asked to work some magic again.

There are possibilities for improvement here, and they start with right guard Kynan Forney. He was a force in the Falcons' cut-blocking scheme, but his play dipped dramatically last season. Justin Blalock made 14 starts at left guard in 2007. His baptism by fire should be over, and he's figured out how to pick up a stunt. He did spend some minicamp time in May at right tackle. The team's tackle positions are in a state of flux. Wayne Gandy and Todd Weiner were the starters for the first game last season. Gandy has since been released, while Weiner is battling back from knee surgery. **GRADE: F**

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		
QB	Chris Redman	Matt Ryan
FB	Ovie Mughelli	Corey McIntyre
RB	Michael Turner	Jerious Norwood
WR	Laurent Robinson	Michael Jenkins
WR	Roddy White	Harry Douglas
TE	Ben Hartsock	Martrez Milner
LT	Sam Baker	Todd Weiner
LG	Quinn Ojinnaka	Alex Stepanovich
C	Todd McClure	Alex Stepanovich
RG	Kynan Forney	Ben Wilkerson
RT	Justin Blalock	Tyson Clabo
DEFENSE		
LE	Chauncey Davis	Jamaal Anderson
DT	Simon Fraser	Rashad Moore
DT	Jonathan Babineaux	Kindal Moorehead
RE	John Abraham	Willie Evans
SLB	Michael Boley	Robert James
MLB	Keith Brooking	Curtis Lofton
WLB	Stephen Nicholas	Keith Brooking
LCB	Chevis Jackson	Von Hutchins
SS	Lawyer Milloy	Daren Stone
FS	Erik Coleman	Thomas DeCoud
RCB	Chris Houston	Wilrey Fontenot
SPECIALISTS		
K	Jason Elam	
P	Michael Koenen	
KR	Jerious Norwood	
PR	Adam Jennings	
LS	Mike Schneck	

FALCONS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1 Tommy Nobis *(1966-76)*

Taken as the franchise's inaugural draft pick, then won Defensive Rookie of the Year and Pro Bowl honors while recording 296 tackles—still the club's single-season mark.

2 Jessie Tuggle *(1987-2000)*

Dropped "The Hammer" (his nickname) 2,065 times in his career, forcing 10 fumbles along the way.

3 Keith Brooking *(1998-present)*

The Georgia boy has never left the state to play football, going from East Coweta High to Georgia Tech to the Falcons, for whom he has made at least 100 tackles for seven years running.

›› DRAFT REPORT GRADE ▸ A-

The Falcons stepped up and grabbed **Matt Ryan** with the third pick in the draft and, while concerns remain about his interception problems, there is no doubt that he brings the great toughness, intangibles, smarts and work ethic necessary to handle being the starting QB of a complete rebuilding project. He has excellent field vision and consistently shows the ability to rally his team from behind and lead it to big wins. Later in the first round, the Falcons reached a bit with LT **Sam Baker**, who reminds some of current Raiders guard Robert Gallery. However, Baker has experience at a very high level, plays with excellent competitiveness and is very smart, which suggests he will be a solid, but not spectacular, starting left tackle. In the second round Atlanta was able to land physical, aggressive and instinctive MLB **Curtis Lofton**, who is going to be a very good starter. With him handling the middle, the Falcons can move star LB Keith Brooking back to the weak side where he is most effective. The Falcons grabbed three players in the third round who are expected to eventually become starters. Corner **Chevis Jackson** fell to the third because he lacks great speed, but he has very quick feet, excellent instincts and consistently makes good plays on the ball. Wideout **Harry Douglas** has excellent hands and is a great athlete who can make big plays running after the catch. **Thomas DeCoud** is a tall and athletic safety who is consistently very good in pass coverage and flashes the ability to be solid in run support. Later, the Falcons selected a number of players who will upgrade their special teams immediately and could develop into starters down the road if they improve certain skills. **Robert James** is an athletic outside linebacker who is very good in coverage and chasing down ballcarriers, but he's undersized and must prove he can deal with blockers.

›› 2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
1	3	Ryan, Matt	QB	6-5	218	Boston College
1	21	Baker, Sam	T	6-5	305	USC
2	6	Lofton, Curtis	LB	6-0	238	Oklahoma
3	5	Jackson, Chevis	CB	6-0	184	LSU
3	21	Douglas, Harry	WR	5-11	170	Louisville
3	35	DeCoud, Thomas	S	6-2	195	California
5	3	James, Robert	LB	5-11	229	Arizona State
5	19	Biermann, Kroy	LB	6-3	242	Montana
6	6	Brown, Thomas	RB	5-8	200	Georgia
7	5	Fontenot, Wilrey	CB	5-9	174	Arizona
7	25	Zinger, Keith	TE	6-4	250	LSU

ROSTER

#	QUARTERBACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
13	Harrington, Joey	QB	6-4	220	10/21/1978	6	Oregon
8	Redman, Chris	QB	6-3	223	07/07/1977	4	Louisville
3	Shockley, D.J.	QB	6-0	214	03/25/1983	0	Georgia

#	OFFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
70	Batiste, D'Anthony	T	6-4	318	03/29/1982	1	Louisiana-Lafayette
63	Blalock, Justin	G	6-4	329	12/30/1983	1	Texas
77	Clabo, Tyson	G	6-6	314	10/17/1981	2	Wake Forest
73	Dahl, Harvey	T	6-5	313	06/24/1981	2	Nevada
61	Datish, Doug	C	6-4	305	08/01/1983	0	Ohio State
65	Forney, Kynan	G	6-3	307	09/08/1978	7	Hawaii
79	Foster, Renardo	G	6-7	338	07/15/1984	1	Louisville
62	McClure, Todd	C	6-1	286	02/16/1977	8	LSU
64	McCoy, Pat	T	6-5	328	12/14/1980	0	West Texas A&M
76	Ojinnaka, Quinn	T	6-5	292	04/23/1984	2	Syracuse
64	Pennington, Terrance	T	6-7	325	09/25/1983	2	New Mexico
71	Quarterman, Kurt	G	6-5	348	10/05/1983	0	Louisville
46	Schneck, Mike	C	6-0	246	08/04/1977	9	Wisconsin
69	Stepanovich, Alex	C	6-4	300	09/25/1981	4	Ohio State
74	Weiner, Todd	T	6-5	297	09/16/1975	10	Kansas State
67	Wilkerson, Ben	C	6-4	305	11/22/1982	2	LSU

#	RUNNING BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
38	McIntyre, Corey	RB	6-0	244	01/25/1979	3	West Virginia
34	Mughelli, Ovie	RB	6-1	255	06/10/1980	5	Wake Forest
32	Norwood, Jerious	RB	5-11	204	07/29/1983	2	Mississippi State
44	Snelling, Jason	RB	5-11	232	12/29/1983	1	Virginia
33	Turner, Michael	RB	5-10	237	02/13/1982	4	Northern Illinois

#	RECEIVERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
80	Cooper, George	TE	6-5	260	03/19/1984	0	Georgia Tech
86	Finneran, Brian	WR	6-5	217	01/31/1976	7	Villanova
89	Hartsock, Ben	TE	6-4	265	07/05/1980	4	Ohio State
87	Horn, Joe	WR	6-1	213	01/16/1972	12	Itawamba (MS) JC
12	Jenkins, Michael	WR	6-4	217	06/18/1982	4	Ohio State
81	Jennings, Adam	WR	5-9	181	11/17/1982	2	Fresno State
88	Milner, Martrez	TE	6-4	260	08/08/1984	1	Georgia
85	Rader, Jason	TE	6-4	274	04/12/1981	1	Marshall
19	Robinson, Laurent	WR	6-2	195	05/20/1985	1	Illinois State
14	Weems, Eric	WR	5-9	186	07/04/1985	1	Bethune-Cookman
84	White, Roddy	WR	6-0	208	11/02/1981	3	UAB

#	DEFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
55	Abraham, John	DE	6-4	258	05/06/1978	8	South Carolina
98	Anderson, Jamaal	DE	6-6	280	02/06/1986	1	Arkansas
93	Anderson, Tim	DT	6-3	304	11/22/1980	4	Ohio State
95	Babineaux, Jonathan	DT	6-2	286	10/12/1981	3	Iowa
92	Davis, Chauncey	DE	6-2	277	01/27/1983	3	Florida State
72	Evans, Willie	DE	6-1	269	03/05/1984	0	Mississippi State
75	Fraser, Simon	DE	6-6	300	03/27/1983	3	Ohio State
99	Jones, Derrick	DE	6-4	282	11/14/1984	1	Grand Valley State
97	Lewis, Trey	DT	6-3	320	05/23/1985	1	Washburn
95	Moore, Rashad	DT	6-3	325	03/16/1979	4	Tennessee
94	Moorehead, Kindal	DT	6-2	285	10/14/1978	5	Alabama
96	Stanley, Montavious	DT	6-2	308	10/10/1981	2	Louisville

#	DEFENSIVE BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
26	Coleman, Erik	S	5-10	200	05/06/1982	4	Washington State
43	Grimes, Brent	CB	5-10	180	07/19/1983	1	Shippensburg
41	Harris, Antoine	CB	5-10	240	04/08/1982	1	Louisville
23	Houston, Chris	CB	5-11	188	10/18/1984	1	Arkansas
25	Hutchins, Von	CB	5-9	181	02/14/1981	4	Mississippi
30	Irons, David	CB	5-11	188	10/09/1982	1	Auburn
36	Milloy, Lawyer	S	6-0	210	11/14/1973	12	Washington
39	Stone, Daren	S	6-3	217	08/21/1985	1	Maine
27	Turnbull, Nick	S	6-2	222	07/28/1981	2	Florida International
24	Williams, Jimmy	S	6-2	216	03/08/1984	2	Virginia Tech

#	LINEBACKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
59	Boley, Michael	LB	6-3	236	08/24/1982	3	Southern Miss
56	Brooking, Keith	LB	6-2	245	10/30/1975	10	Georgia Tech
47	Everett, Earl	LB	6-3	231	12/10/1984	0	Florida
54	Nicholas, Stephen	LB	6-3	225	05/01/1983	1	South Florida
53	Taylor, Tony	LB	6-0	237	07/21/1984	1	Georgia
49	Vaughn, Cameron	LB	6-4	241	02/27/1984	0	LSU
45	Williams, Travis	LB	6-1	213	01/20/1983	1	Auburn

#	KICKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
1	Elam, Jason	K	5-11	195	03/08/1970	15	Hawaii
9	Koenen, Michael	P	5-11	195	07/13/1982	3	Western Washington
6	Lovell, Kevin	K	5-9	155	04/14/1984	0	Cincinnati

▶ **MIKE SMITH,** *Head coach*

Mike Mularkey, off. coord.; **Brian VanGorder**, def. coord.; **Emmitt Thomas**, asst. head coach/secondary; **Keith Armstrong**, special teams coord.; **Paul Boudreau**, off. line; **Gerald Brown**, running backs; **Paul Dunn**, asst. off. line; **Ray Hamilton**, def. line; **Tom McMahon**, asst. special teams; **Bill Musgrave**, quarterbacks; **Glenn Pires**, linebackers; **Alvin Reynolds**, def. backs; **Terry Robiskie**, wide receivers; **Chris Scelfo**, tight ends

DEFENSE

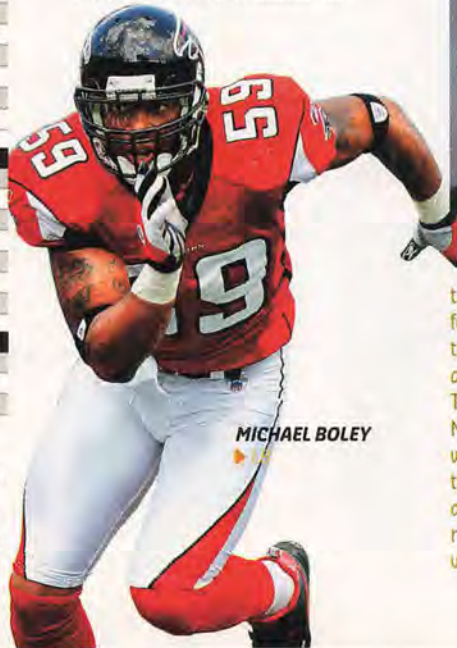
Defensive coordinator Brian VanGorder gets his big shot in the NFL after bouncing between the college game and the league over the last four seasons. He was the Falcons' linebacker coach last season after serving a year as Georgia Southern's head coach. He coached linebackers with Smith at Jacksonville the year before that and was at the University of Georgia before going to Jacksonville.

VanGorder had a reputation for playing an attacking 4-3 defense while defensive coordinator at Georgia. The Falcons spent heavily on the secondary in the draft and free agency, signaling that major changes are on the way. They are preparing to play a myriad of zone coverages and allow VanGorder to pick his spots with a creative blitz package.

Defensive line » The Falcons decided to pass on LSU defensive tackle Glenn Dorsey in the draft. Atlanta didn't think highly enough of the draft's depth at that position, so it elected not to select any tackles after passing on Dorsey. That was a stunner. Rod Coleman and Grady Jackson were the preferred No. 1 tackles last season, but both have been released. Dorsey, a miniature Warren Sapp clone, could have anchored the line for years.

The Falcons did sign experienced tackles Rashad Moore and Kindal Moorehead. Both were second-tier free agents. Moore is a 325-pound run-stuffer, while Moorehead played in all 16 games each of the last two seasons for the Panthers but made only one start. That duo will have to beat out Montavious Stanley and Jonathan Babineaux. Moorehead did have five sacks in 2005 and can get some pressure up the middle.

End Jamaal Anderson started all 16 games as rookie but did not register a sack. He can expect to split time with four-year veteran Chauncey Davis this season unless he



MICHAEL BOLEY ▶ LB

OFFSEASON MOVES

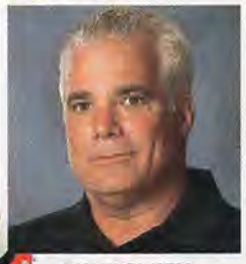
ADDITIONS:

RB **Michael Turner** *(FA/Chargers)*, DB **Erik Coleman** *(FA/Jets)*, DB **Von Hutchins** *(FA/Texans)*, TE **Ben Hartsock** *(FA/Titans)*, DT **Rashad Moore** *(FA/Patriots)*, DE **Kindal Moorehead** *(FA/Panthers)*, DE **Simon Fraser** *(FA/Browns)*, C **Alex Stepanovich** *(FA/Bengals)*, K **Jason Elam** *(FA/Broncos)*

SUBTRACTIONS:

LB **Marcus Wilkins** *(FA)*, DT **Rod Coleman** *(FA)*, QB **Byron Leftwich** *(FA)*, T **Wayne Gandy** *(FA)*, DB **Lewis Sanders** *(FA/Patriots)*, TE **Alge Crumpler** *(FA/Titans)*, LB **Demorrio Williams** *(FA/Chiefs)*, TE **Courtney Anderson** *(FA/Bills)*, DB **Omare Lowe** *(FA/Seahawks)*, TE **Dwayne Blakley** *(FA/Titans)*, DB **Chris Crocker** *(FA/Dolphins)*, K **Morten Andersen** *(FA)*, RB **Warrick Dunn** *(FA/Buccaneers)*

INSIDE THE HEADSET



MIKE SMITH

As the Falcons rebuild their offensive line, look for Smith to play it close to the vest with a running attack built around Michael Turner and Jerious Norwood. Defensively, he will have an attacking unit that is stout up the middle and designed to stop the run first, and he will play a variety of zone coverages.

(L TO R): JOE ROBBINS / GETTY IMAGES; HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL

FANTASY SPIN

http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football

TURNER

NORWOOD

ROBINSON

Roddy White had a breakout year in '07. Now, just imagine what he could do with a stable quarterback situation. Expect another solid season from the fourth-year wideout.

$ BUY »	Michael Turner, RB
SELL »	Jerious Norwood, RB
Z SLEEPER »	Laurent Robinson, WR

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/09	L	3-24	at Minnesota Vikings
09/16	L	7-13	at Jacksonville Jaguars
09/23	L	20-27	Carolina Panthers
09/30	W	26-16	Houston Texans
10/07	L	13-20	at Tennessee Titans
10/15	L	10-31	New York Giants
10/21	L	16-22	at New Orleans Saints
11/04	W	20-16	San Francisco 49ers
11/11	W	20-13	at Carolina Panthers
11/18	L	7-31	Tampa Bay Buccaneers
11/22	L	13-31	Indianapolis Colts
12/02	L	16-28	at St. Louis Rams
12/10	L	14-34	New Orleans Saints
12/16	L	3-37	at Tampa Bay Buccaneers
12/23	L	27-30	at Arizona Cardinals
12/30	W	44-41	Seattle Seahawks

WON 4, LOST 12

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Dunn	227	720	3.2	38	4
Norwood	103	613	6.0	67t	1
Pinner	5	46	9.2	49	0
Snelling	13	43	3.3	17	1
Williams	1	37	37.0	37	0
Harrington	14	33	2.4	13	0
Redman	8	16	2.0	7	0
Leftwich	6	7	1.2	7	0
Mughelli	6	7	1.2	3	1
Koenen	1	0	0.0	0	0
White	1	-2	-2.0	-2	0
FALCONS	**385**	**1520**	**3.9**	**67t**	**7**
OPPONENTS	481	2033	4.2	50t	12

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
White	83	1202	14.5	69t	6
Jenkins	53	532	10.0	29	4
Crumpler	42	444	10.6	55t	5
Dunn	37	238	6.4	35	0
Robinson	37	437	11.8	74t	1
Norwood	28	277	9.9	46	0
Horn	27	243	9.0	26	1
Milner	9	50	5.6	15	0
Blakley	7	48	6.9	11	0
Jennings	6	62	10.3	28	1
Mughelli	6	36	6.0	12	0
Harrington	1	4	4.0	4	0
FALCONS	**336**	**3573**	**10.6**	**74t**	**18**
OPPONENTS	336	3801	11.3	60t	27

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Harrington	348	215	2215	7	8
Redman	149	89	1079	10	5
Leftwich	58	32	279	1	2
FALCONS	**555**	**336**	**3573**	**18**	**15**
OPPONENTS	536	336	3801	27	16

SACKS FALCONS 25, OPPONENTS 47

Abraham 10, Babineaux 3, Boley 3, Brooking 2, Coleman 2, Davis 2, Crocker 1, Jackson 1, Nicholas 1

Linebackers » Curtis Lofton, the Falcons' second-round pick, is the heir apparent to Keith Brooking at middle linebacker. Lofton played the strong side for most of his career at Oklahoma. He was eventually moved to the middle and found a new home. Lofton moves well to the ball and delivers a nice wallop. His versatility allows him to serve as a backup at both positions, so he won't have to be rushed onto the field.

Michael Boley continues to develop into a star on the strong side. He's stout against the run and can drop in coverage, turn and run with receivers. Teams tend to find the other holes and stay away from Boley. The Falcons may want to move Boley around more to keep teams from game-planning away from him.

Stephen Nicholas, a second-year player from South Florida, is set to take over on the weak side. A high-ankle injury kept him from replacing the departed Demorrio Williams last season. The Falcons also like Arizona State rookie Robert James, a smallish, run-and-hit weakside linebacker. He'll get a chance to make his mark on special teams. **GRADE: B**

Secondary » The Falcons spent big in free agency and made key pickups in the draft with an eye toward a makeover in the secondary, adding veteran free safety Erik Coleman and nickel back Von Hutchins as free agents. Coleman is a former starter with the New York Jets who fell out of favor with coach Eric Mangini. He has more than adequate range, breaks well on the ball and is an above-average hitter. Coleman is set to start alongside strong safety Lawyer Milloy, who's in the last year of his contract.

The Falcons traded DeAngelo Hall and will be very young at cornerback. Hutchins could end up opening the season at Hall's old left-cornerback spot. Second-year man Chris Houston is set at right corner. Look for rookie Chevis Jackson of LSU to make a push for one of the spots that would allow Hutchins to stay at nickel back. These moves signal the end for former second-round pick Jimmy Williams, who flopped at cornerback and safety.

The Falcons also have special-teams demon David Irons, Brent Grimes and Daren Stone fighting for spots. Atlanta drafted Thomas DeCoud, a hybrid free/strong safety from Cal, to serve an apprenticeship under Milloy and be ready to step in next season. **GRADE: C**

SPECIAL TEAMS

The kicking game was an afterthought the last few seasons as the Falcons tried to address the position on the cheap. After the low-budget options didn't work out, however, they even dusted off Morten Andersen. By signing Jason Elam, the Falcons appear to finally have a stable placekicking situation. In a key midseason move, they also ended their experiments with young and unproven snappers and signed veteran Michael Schneck.

The punting game is in good hands with Michael Koenen, who hits booming kicks. He also handles the long field-goal chores and kickoff duties.

Norwood was dazzling as a kickoff returner, but the Falcons added Brown in the draft and hope he can take over that job and beat out incumbent Jennings for the punt-returner position. **GRADE: B**

BOTTOM LINE

You just can't change the general manager, hire a new coach, watch the quarterback go off to jail, get rid of most of your former Pro Bowlers and think that the shipwrecked boat is just going to sail right along. The under-construction sign will remain on this massive undertaking for this season at the very least. There is just too much going on for the Falcons to have any semblance of unity and continuity after the Vick era. The Dimitroff-Smith Plan needs some time to take hold. Anything close to 8-8, and Smith should be nominated for Coach of the Year.

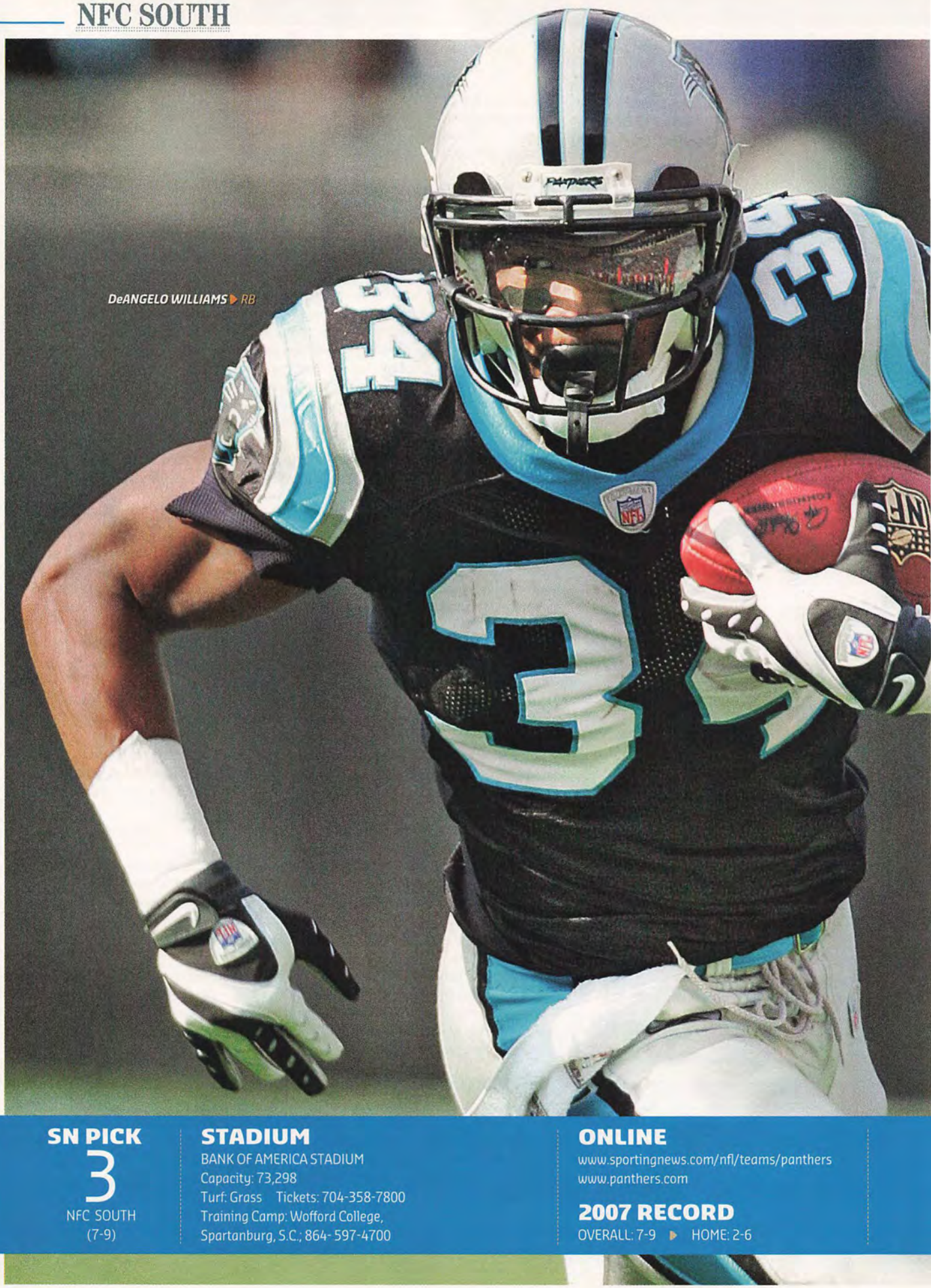
61

FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT

UP

HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL



SN PICK
3
NFC SOUTH
(7-9)

STADIUM
BANK OF AMERICA STADIUM
Capacity: 73,298
Turf: Grass Tickets: 704-358-7800
Training Camp: Wofford College,
Spartanburg, S.C.; 864- 597-4700

ONLINE
www.sportingnews.com/nfl/teams/panthers
www.panthers.com

2007 RECORD
OVERALL: 7-9 ▶ HOME: 2-6

(L TO R): BOB LEVERONE / SN (2); HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL

CAROLINA PANTHERS

Look for changes at the top if Cats don't prowl into postseason

By Matt McKenzie, *Sporting News*

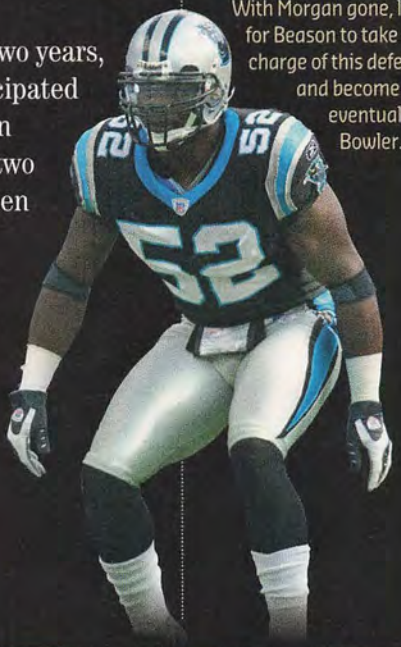
A disappointing 7-9 campaign in 2007 marked the first time in coach John Fox's tenure that the Carolina Panthers failed to make the playoffs in back-to-back seasons. And despite rumors to the contrary, Fox and general manager Marty Hurney were given a vote of confidence by owner Jerry Richardson after the three met in early January at Richardson's lake house.

Carolina has gone 15-17 over the last two years, and is a far cry from the team that participated in the Super Bowl during the 2003 season and made the NFC championship game two years later. The last two seasons have been marred by poor signings and personnel moves, along with devastating injuries like the one suffered last year by quarterback Jake Delhomme, who had to undergo Tommy John surgery on his

BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

JON BEASON ▸ LB

It didn't take long for Beason to establish his presence in the NFL. He started every game for the Panthers last season as a rookie, and finished third on the team in tackles with 140. Carolina thinks highly of the middle linebacker, enough to finally give Dan Morgan his release. With Morgan gone, look for Beason to take charge of this defense and become an eventual Pro Bowler.



FANTASY SPIN

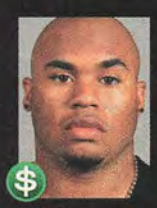
http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football

DeAngelo Williams will be the starter now that DeShaun Foster is gone, but there's no guarantee he'll put up big numbers. Draft Williams as a No. 2 fantasy back and hope for better.

$ BUY »»
Steve Smith, WR

SELL »»
Muhsin Muhammad, WR

Z SLEEPER »»
Jeff King, TE



SMITH

MUHAMMAD

KING

throwing elbow after starting just three games.

Adopting what looks to be a "win-now" mentality, the Panthers were one of the more active teams in the offseason. They started by jettisoning disappointing former starters—quarterback David Carr, running back DeShaun Foster and linebacker Dan Morgan—and then went out and signed 11 free agents, along with trading away their first-round pick in 2009 to have two first-rounders in April's draft.

Fox and Hurney have to hope that selection will be somewhere in the mid-to-late 20s. If so, the postseason drought will have ended. And if it ends up being an earlier selection, the duo won't have to worry about any criticism for the trade, because they more than likely won't be around.

OFFENSE

Prior to last season, Jeff Davidson was hired to be Carolina's new offensive coordinator. Coming over from Cleveland, Davidson's task was to implement a zone-blocking scheme that would showcase the quickness of Foster and DeAngelo Williams. But the running game never really got off the ground, so the Panthers may move back to more of a power attack with the addition of 2008 first-round pick Jonathan Stewart.

Much of the offense's success, however, will hinge on the return of Delhomme. Team officials have been pleased with his progress after the surgery and say his rehab is on schedule. If he comes back to full strength, no one will be happier than his favorite target, Steve Smith, who registered his third straight 1,000-yard receiving season in 2007 despite having four different starting quarterbacks doing the passing.

DRAFT REPORT GRADE ▸ A-

The Panthers stepped up and helped their team for 2008 with two solid first-round draft picks. By grabbing RB **Jonathan Stewart** with its first pick, Carolina now has some power to combine with the speed of DeAngelo Williams. Stewart has the size, strength, explosiveness and playing speed to be a very productive starter if he can stay healthy. Carolina traded with Philadelphia to get back into the first round and select OT **Jeff Otah**, who will likely start immediately. Otah has the natural strength to be dominant once he gets a hold of his man, but will have trouble against explosive speed rushers. Early in the third round, the Panthers took CB **Charles Godfrey**, who struggled with consistency throughout his career. He will need to compete at a much higher level and improve his technique to become an NFL starter. Linebacker **Dan Connor** provides depth, while TE **Gary Barnidge** is a sure-handed receiver who may have trouble blocking in the pros. Defensive tackle **Nick Hayden** is a tough and highly competitive player who is ideally a backup, but he could become a starter down the road due to his strength and passion for the game. Defensive end **Hilee Taylor** wasn't productive in college until his senior season and is a good value in the sixth round because of his quickness and playing speed. During the final round, Carolina added two offensive linemen in **Geoff Schwartz** and **Mackenzy Bernadeau**. Schwartz has the excellent size to be a very good backup guard and tackle. Bernadeau has the tools to start but is raw and will have a big adjustment moving up from Division II football.

2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
1	13	Stewart, Jonathan	RB	5-11	230	Oregon
1	19	Otah, Jeff	T	6-6	340	Pittsburgh
3	4	Godfrey, Charles	CB	6-1	208	Iowa
3	11	Connor, Dan	LB	6-3	233	Penn State
5	6	Barnidge, Gary	TE	6-6	234	Louisville
6	15	Hayden, Nick	DT	6-5	301	Wisconsin
7	14	Taylor, Hilee	LB	6-3	242	North Carolina
7	34	Schwartz, Geoff	T	6-7	335	Oregon
7	43	Bernadeau, Mackenzy	G	6-4	298	Bentley College

Quarterbacks Delhomme is only the third NFL quarterback (joining Rob Johnson and Craig Erickson) to undergo Tommy John surgery. The injury forced the Panthers to play quarterback roulette the rest of the year with Carr, Vinny Testaverde and Matt Moore.

Carr, the No. 1 pick overall in the 2002 draft, was given new life in Carolina after a tumultuous five seasons with Houston. But he threw just three touchdowns to go with five

5-YEAR WINS TREND

THE BOOK ON ... STEVE SMITH *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"Smith is in a good position to rebound from what many view as a disappointing season, but the reality is that his play did not slip—he was just limited by an offense with no other weapons that was missing their starting quarterback, after Jake Delhomme got hurt. Smith is a tremendously competitive receiver who is very quick, running excellent routes and has a real burst out of his cuts to easily get separation from defenders.

"He has very good hands and consistently makes tough catches seem easy. Once he gets the ball in his hands, he is a big-play receiver who is a real touchdown threat every time he touches the ball. His competitiveness also shows up in (his) being a good downfield blocker.

"The only real negative NFL teams feel that Smith has is that he is short. Other than that, he is the complete package and one of the premier receivers in the NFL. If Delhomme is back healthy in 2008, expect Smith to have a year where his numbers are back to their normal level."

NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	284.9	29
RUSHING	114.0	14
PASSING	170.9	29
SCORING	267	26t
PUNT RETURNS	8.4	20
KICK RETURNS	19.1	31
RED ZONE TD %	50.0	18t
TOTAL DEFENSE	324.8	16
AGAINST RUSH	110.7	18
AGAINST PASS	214.1	17
POINTS ALLOWED	347	15
INTERCEPTIONS	14	23t
SACKS	23	31
TURNOVER DIFF.	+1	13t

TOP TO BOTTOM: JAY DROWNS, BOB LEVERONE / SN

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE *(an opponent breaks down the Panthers)*

"They're happy with (Jake) Delhomme. I think he's coming back from the injury. I think they also have to be very happy with (Matt) Moore; I think he has a chance at being a starter. They don't seem too comfortable at running back. (DeAngelo) Williams is a change-of-pace running back. They need to get a big back to be the guy and have DeAngelo Williams touch the ball 12 to 14 times a game. The offensive line is in good standing; there still are questions at guard, though. They need a tight end, and still don't have anybody to throw to other than Steve Smith. I think Dwayne Jarrett is going to be a bust. He hasn't shown commitment to the game. ...

"Defensively, they have to be really happy with the pickup of (safety) Chris Harris last year, and want to get another safety to pair with him. They're good enough at corner with (Chris) Gamble and (Richard) Marshall, but needed to get someone in the draft to help. The defensive line is an issue. A lot of those players are getting older. I think (defensive end) Charles Johnson can be a starter, but with (Kris) Jenkins traded, they have to address the tackle position. They have good guys there, but not ones you want starting. All in all, I think this is a team with some talent, but they need a lot of things to come together to be a 10-6 team."

interceptions in six games (four starts), and was plagued during the season by a back injury. As for the 44-year-old Testaverde, retirement finally sounded like a better option than sacrificing his body for a 22nd NFL season.

Moore was the third option, and he directed the Panthers to a 2-1 finish, throwing for 564 yards and three TDs during that time. Moore showed enough late last year to become the top backup for the Panthers and the potential starter if Delhomme isn't fully healthy. Brett Basanez spent much of last year on injured reserve, but should remain the team's third signal-caller.

Delhomme was off to one of his best starts last season (624 yards, 8 TDs, 1 INT in three games) before going down with the injury. The hope is Delhomme can actually come back stronger, but that's a lot to be riding on a surgery that has had inconclusive results so far for NFL quarterbacks. **GRADE: C**

Running backs » The Panthers will look for Stewart to provide them with the bruising back they haven't had since Stephen Davis. Stewart, who had turf-toe surgery in March but is expected to be ready for training camp, will be counted on to move the chains in short-yardage situations, something Carolina has struggled with in recent years.

Drafting Stewart also allows the team to utilize Williams' home-run ability. The former first-round pick, who rushed for 717 yards and a team-leading four touchdowns last season, has shown improvement in each of his first two years.

Brad Hoover, a good blocker, enters his ninth season at fullback for the Panthers. **GRADE: C**

Receivers » Ever since Muhsin Muhammad left for Chicago in free agency three years ago, Carolina hasn't had a strong complement to Smith. Last season, opponents were often double-teaming him, giving no respect to Drew Carter or Keary Colbert. Despite the extra attention, Smith showed again why he's one of the NFL's best, totaling 1,002 yards and seven touchdowns. The Panthers will try to find any way possible to get him the ball.

Carter and Colbert both signed elsewhere, and the Panthers brought back Muhammad, who played nine seasons with Carolina before signing with the Bears. He brings a physical style as a possession receiver and is one of the league's top blocking wideouts.

D.J. Hackett was arguably the Panthers' most high-profile acquisition in the offseason, and they are counting on him to come in and start immediately opposite Smith. Staying healthy is the biggest goal for Hackett, who hasn't played all 16 games in any of his three NFL seasons. There were high hopes for Dwayne Jarrett, last year's second-round pick, but he barely made it onto the field because of his struggles with learning the playbook.

Tight end Jeff King emerged as a starter last season with 406 receiving yards and two touchdowns,

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		
QB	Jake Delhomme	Matt Moore
FB	Brad Hoover	Nick Goings
RB	Jonathan Stewart	DeAngelo Williams
WR	Steve Smith	Dwayne Jarrett
WR	D.J. Hackett	Muhsin Muhammad
TE	Jeff King	Dante Rosario
LT	Jordan Gross	Travelle Wharton
LG	Travelle Wharton	Toniu Fonoti
C	Ryan Kalil	Geoff Hangartner
RG	Jeremy Bridges	Keydrick Vincent
RT	Jeff Otah	Evan Mathis
DEFENSE		
LE	Julius Peppers	Stanley McClover
LT	Maake Kemoeatu	Nick Hayden
RT	Damione Lewis	Darwin Walker
RE	Charles Johnson	Tyler Brayton
SLB	Thomas Davis	Adam Seward
MLB	Jon Beason	Dan Connor
WLB	Na'il Diggs	Landon Johnson
LCB	Chris Gamble	Ricardo Colclough
SS	Chris Harris	Nate Salley
FS	Terrence Holt	Charles Godfrey
RCB	Richard Marshall	Ken Lucas
SPECIALISTS		
K	John Kasay	
P	Jason Baker	
KR	Ryne Robinson	
PR	Ryne Robinson	
LS	Jason Kyle	

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 @ San Diego	SEPT. 7	4:15	W / L
WEEK 2 Chicago	SEPT. 14	1:00	W / L
WEEK 3 @ Minnesota	SEPT. 21	1:00	W / L
WEEK 4 Atlanta	SEPT. 28	1:00	W / L
WEEK 5 Kansas City	OCT. 5	1:00	W / L
WEEK 6 @ Tampa Bay	OCT. 12	1:00	W / L
WEEK 7 New Orleans	OCT. 19	1:00	W / L
WEEK 8 Arizona	OCT. 26	1:00	W / L
WEEK 9 *OPEN DATE*			
WEEK 10 @ Oakland	NOV. 9	4:05	W / L
WEEK 11 Detroit	NOV. 16	1:00	W / L
WEEK 12 @ Atlanta	NOV. 23	1:00	W / L
WEEK 13 @ Green Bay	NOV. 30	1:00	W / L
WEEK 14 Tampa Bay	DEC. 8	8:30	W / L
WEEK 15 Denver	DEC. 14	1:00	W / L
WEEK 16 @ New York Giants	DEC. 21	1:00	W / L
WEEK 17 @ New Orleans	DEC. 28	1:00	W / L

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

while second-year pro Dante Rosario (108 yards, 2 TDs) was a surprise late in the year. Also watch for fifth-round pick Gary Barnidge. **GRADE: B-**

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/09	W	27-13	at St. Louis Rams
09/16	L	21-34	Houston Texans
09/23	W	27-20	at Atlanta Falcons
09/30	L	7-20	Tampa Bay Buccaneers
10/07	W	16-13	at New Orleans Saints
10/14	W	25-10	at Arizona Cardinals
10/28	L	7-31	Indianapolis Colts
11/04	L	7-20	at Tennessee Titans
11/11	L	13-20	Atlanta Falcons
11/18	L	17-31	at Green Bay Packers
11/25	L	6-31	New Orleans Saints
12/02	W	31-14	San Francisco 49ers
12/09	L	6-37	at Jacksonville Jaguars
12/16	W	13-10	Seattle Seahawks
12/22	L	13-20	Dallas Cowboys
12/30	W	31-23	at Tampa Bay Buccaneers

WON 7, LOST 9

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Foster	247	876	3.5	20	3
Williams	144	717	5.0	75	4
Smith	9	66	7.3	22	0
Carr	17	59	3.5	15	0
Hoover	12	39	3.3	10	0
Delhomme	6	26	4.3	13	0
Testaverde	9	22	2.4	16	0
Jarrett	1	11	11.0	11	0
Moore	3	5	1.7	5	0
Haynes	3	3	1.0	3	0
PANTHERS	**451**	**1824**	**4.0**	**75**	**7**
OPPONENTS	472	1771	3.8	80t	13

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Smith	87	1002	11.5	74t	7
King	46	406	8.8	29	2
Carter	38	517	13.6	49	4
Colbert	32	332	10.4	43	0
Foster	25	182	7.3	23	1
Williams	23	175	7.6	30	1
Hoover	10	58	5.8	14	0
Jarrett	6	73	12.2	22	0
Rosario	6	108	18.0	54	2
Fauria	5	39	7.8	16	2
Robinson	4	35	8.8	12	0
Haynes	3	14	4.7	6	0
PANTHERS	**285**	**2941**	**10.3**	**74t**	**19**
OPPONENTS	337	3603	10.7	69t	22

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Testaverde	172	94	952	5	6
Carr	136	73	635	3	5
Moore	111	63	730	3	5
Delhomme	86	55	624	8	1
PANTHERS	**505**	**285**	**2941**	**19**	**17**
OPPONENTS	537	337	3603	22	14

SACKS — **PANTHERS 23, OPPONENTS 33**

Diggs 3.5, Lewis 3.5, Davis 3, Rucker 3, Jenkins 2.5, Peppers 2.5, Moorehead 2, Manuel 1, Marshall 1, McClover 1

Offensive line The biggest overhaul in the offseason for Carolina was the O-line, as every position will have a new full-time starter. While Travelle Wharton and Jordan Gross (who was given the franchise tag) were both re-signed, they will each be playing a different position. Gross will move from right to left tackle, while Wharton shifts from left tackle to left guard.

Wharton's move also makes room for Jeff Otah, the 19th overall pick in this year's draft. Otah, who's massive at 6-6 and 340 pounds, is expected to make an immediate impact on the line. At right guard, a battle will be waged among free-agent signees Keydrick Vincent, Toniu Fonoti and Milford Brown and holdover Jeremy Bridges, who started 10 games at the position in 2007. And with the release of Justin Hartwig, second-year pro Ryan Kalil will get the nod at center.

On paper, this looks to be one of the better lines in recent years for the Panthers. It's a good group for employing Fox's run-first philosophy, and it should also give Delhomme decent time in the pocket. **GRADE: B**

DEFENSE

A team that once prided itself on defense struggled in that area last season. Carolina was 16th in total defense, its lowest rank in three years. Panthers star Julius Peppers seemed nonexistent at times, and offseason departures have given the line a new look for 2008.

Defensive coordinator Mike Trgovac needs to get better contributions from his front four for Carolina to reestablish its longstanding label as a defense-first squad.

Defensive line The days of Peppers, Kris Jenkins and Mike Rucker roaming the front are now gone. That trio was the heart and soul of Carolina's defense, but now only Peppers remains after Jenkins was traded to the Jets and Rucker retired. With just 2.5 sacks in 2007, it was a season to forget for Peppers, a three-time Pro Bowler. However, he is entering a contract season.

The Panthers signed Tyler Brayton, a former first-round pick, and he'll compete for the other end spot with second-year pro Charles Johnson, who started two games late last season. Stanley McClover provides solid depth, and the Panthers seem high on seventh-round pick Hilee Taylor.

OFFSEASON MOVES

ADDITIONS:

DB **Ricardo Colclough** *(FA/Browns)*, G **Keydrick Vincent** *(FA/Cardinals)*, DE **Tyler Brayton** *(FA/Raiders)*, LB **Landon Johnson** *(FA/Bengals)*, RB **LaBrandon Toefield** *(FA/Jaguars)*, WR **D.J. Hackett** *(FA/Seahawks)*, S **Terrence Holt** *(FA/Cardinals)*, G **Toniu Fonoti** *(FA/Falcons)*, G **Milford Brown** *(FA/Rams)*, DT **Darwin Walker** *(FA/Bears)*, WR **Muhsin Muhammad** *(FA/Bears)*

SUBTRACTIONS:

G **Mike Wahle** *(FA/Seahawks)*, LB **Dan Morgan** *(FA/Saints)*, RB **DeShaun Foster** *(FA/49ers)*, QB **David Carr** *(FA/Giants)*, FS **Deke Cooper** *(FA)*, DE **Kindal Moorehead** *(FA/Falcons)*, WR **Drew Carter** *(FA/Raiders)*, DB **Curtis Deloatch** *(FA)*, TE **Christian Fauria** *(FA)*, WR **Keary Colbert** *(FA/Broncos)*, QB **Vinny Testaverde** *(retired)*, S **Marquand Manuel** *(FA/Broncos)*, C **Justin Hartwig** *(FA/Steelers)*, DE **Mike Rucker** *(retired)*

Defensive tackle Maake Kemoeatu rebounded after a disappointing first season with the Panthers, finishing with a career-high 46 tackles in 2007. Damione Lewis becomes the other starter at tackle, replacing Jenkins.

Tackle was thought to be an area of need in the draft, but Carolina didn't choose one until the sixth round, selecting Wisconsin's Nick Hayden. However, shortly after the draft, the Panthers shored up the position up by signing veteran Darwin Walker, who will see some playing time. **GRADE: B-**

Linebackers Jon Beason validated his first-round selection last year and was one of the few bright spots for Carolina's defense in 2007. He finished third in the NFL in tackles (140). The emergence of Beason finally allowed Carolina to cut ties with Morgan, who was unable to consistently stay healthy.

At strongside linebacker, it appears that Thomas Davis' athleticism is beginning to match his potential on the field. He'll be entering his third year as a starter and has become one of the hardest hitters on the team. Na'il Diggs and offseason addition Landon Johnson will compete for the weakside starting spot. Diggs, a ninth-year player, started nine of 16 games last year and tied Lewis for the team lead in sacks. With essentially four starters, linebacker should be a team strength this season.

The Panthers raised more than a few eyebrows when they drafted Penn State's Dan Connor. They didn't have a need at linebacker, but thought

PANTHERS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1 Sam Mills *(1995-97)*

Made the Pro Bowl five times in his career and is the only player to be enshrined in the Panthers' Hall of Honor.

2 Kevin Greene *(1996, 1998-99)*

Five-time Pro Bowler ranks third overall in the NFL for career sacks (160) and led the league with 14.5 for Carolina in 1996.

3 Mark Fields *(2002, 2004)*

Two-time Pro Bowler totaled nearly 600 tackles and 35 sacks in his nine-year career.

INSIDE THE HEADSET

JOHN FOX

Fox came up through the coaching ranks with a defense-first philosophy, and has remained steadfast during his time with the Panthers. Fox would rather play the field-position game than take a gamble on fourth-and-short, which hasn't always earned him admiration from the Carolina faithful. Growing concerns about his job security could change that line of thinking this season, however.

they were getting a great value in Round 3 with the Nittany Lions' career tackles leader. **GRADE: B**

Secondary Strong safety Chris Harris is the anchor of this group, as he finished second on the Panthers with 96 tackles while setting a team record for forced fumbles (8). The other safety spot is undecided. Mike Minter retired midway through training camp last year, and Nate Salley and Deke Cooper struggled throughout the season. Carolina signed Terrence Holt, who was a 16-game starter for the Cardinals last year but had trouble with missed assignments at times.

Carolina has three players with starting experience at cornerback, but questions remain about their overall abilities. Chris Gamble has a penchant for getting beat in one-on-one coverage, while eighth-year pro Ken Lucas seems to have lost a step. The best of this group is Richard Marshall, who tied for the team lead in interceptions (3) despite starting only six games.

Third-round pick Charles Godfrey could compete with Holt at free safety. **GRADE: C+**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Kicker John Kasay remains the only player from Carolina's expansion-season roster. And the 39-year-old shows no sign of slowing down, as he's made at least 24 field goals in each of the last three seasons. Long snapper Jason Kyle is as solid as they come, while punter Jason Baker has ranked in the top three for total yards the last two seasons.

Ryne Robinson was drafted last year to help in the return game, and he shook off early struggles to eventually showcase his potential. Speedy free-agent signee Ricardo Colclough could also aid in this area.

The coverage units allowed some huge returns last season, and the defense's starting field position was one of the worst in the league. Carolina hopes to get better contributions from players like Wesley and Adam Seward, along with rookies Connor and Godfrey. **GRADE: B**

BOTTOM LINE

It's hard not to think that this is a make-or-break year for Fox. Expectations have run high in Carolina since that Super Bowl season, and patience is wearing thin, especially given the talent on this team. The Panthers addressed most of their offseason needs, so now it's up to Fox and his players to produce.

Carolina has pinned a lot of hope on the return of Delhomme, and could be in trouble if things don't go as expected with his recovery. But with solid years from Delhomme, Smith and the running game, plus a return to form by Peppers, the Panthers look to be a team that can once again challenge for the NFC South title.

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FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT

STEADY

HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL

ROSTER

#	QUARTERBACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
14	Basanez, Brett	QB	6-2	210	05/11/1983	1	Northwestern
17	Delhomme, Jake	QB	6-2	215	01/10/1975	7	Louisiana-Lafayette
3	Moore, Matt	QB	6-3	202	08/09/1984	1	Oregon State

#	OFFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
73	Bridges, Jeremy	G	6-4	326	04/19/1980	4	Southern Miss
61	Brown, Milford	G	6-5	330	08/15/1980	5	Florida State
68	Fonoti, Toniu	G	6-4	350	11/26/1981	4	Nebraska
69	Gross, Jordan	T	6-4	300	07/20/1980	5	Utah
63	Hangartner, Geoff	C	6-5	301	04/22/1982	3	Texas A&M
65	Kalil, Ryan	C	6-2	295	03/29/1985	1	USC
71	Mathis, Evan	G	6-5	304	11/01/1981	3	Alabama
76	Omiyale, Frank	T	6-4	310	11/23/1982	1	Tennessee Tech
72	Riley, Rueben	G	6-4	305	09/20/1984	0	Michigan
73	Vincent, Keydrick	G	6-5	325	04/13/1978	7	Mississippi
70	Wharton, Travelle	T	6-4	312	05/19/1981	4	South Carolina

#	RUNNING BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
26	Birmingham, DeCori	RB	5-11	200	11/22/1982	0	Arkansas
32	Fleming, Troy	RB	6-0	245	10/01/1980	2	Tennessee
37	Goings, Nick	RB	6-0	225	01/26/1978	7	Pittsburgh
24	Haynes, Alex	RB	5-10	225	02/13/1982	1	UCF
45	Hoover, Brad	RB	6-0	245	11/11/1976	8	Western Carolina
33	Toefield, LaBrandon	RB	5-11	232	09/24/1980	5	LSU
34	Williams, DeAngelo	RB	5-9	217	04/25/1983	2	Memphis

#	RECEIVERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
11	Carter, Jason	WR	6-0	205	09/15/1982	1	Texas A&M
12	Davis, Josh	WR	6-1	188	12/11/1980	0	Marshall
18	Hackett, D.J.	WR	6-2	208	07/03/1981	3	Colorado
15	Hannon, Chris	WR	6-3	205	02/18/1984	0	Tennessee
80	Jarrett, Dwayne	WR	6-4	219	09/11/1986	1	USC
47	King, Jeff	TE	6-3	260	02/19/1983	2	Virginia Tech
87	Muhammad, Muhsin	WR	6-2	215	05/05/1973	12	Michigan State
10	Robinson, Ryne	WR	5-9	179	11/04/1984	1	Miami (OH)
88	Rosario, Dante	TE	6-4	250	10/25/1984	1	Oregon
89	Smith, Steve	WR	5-9	185	05/12/1979	7	Utah
19	Taylor, Travis	WR	6-1	210	03/30/1978	8	Florida
81	Thompson, Dominique	WR	5-11	205	12/28/1982	1	William & Mary
85	Upshaw, Chad	TE	6-4	246	06/23/1984	0	Buffalo

#	DEFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
96	Brayton, Tyler	DE	6-6	280	11/20/1979	5	Colorado
91	Gibson, Gary	DT	6-3	285	05/05/1982	1	Rutgers
95	Johnson, Charles	DE	6-2	270	07/10/1986	1	Georgia
99	Kemoeatu, Maake	DT	6-5	345	01/10/1979	6	Utah
92	Lewis, Damione	DT	6-2	301	03/01/1978	7	Miami (FL)
75	McClover, Stanley	DE	6-2	263	12/16/1984	2	Auburn
90	Peppers, Julius	DE	6-7	283	01/18/1980	6	North Carolina
94	Scott, Ian	DT	6-3	302	11/08/1981	6	Florida
93	Walker, Darwin	DT	6-3	294	06/15/1977	8	Tennessee
98	Williams, Stephen	DT	6-2	306	09/21/1981	1	Northwest Missouri St.

#	DEFENSIVE BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
22	Colclough, Ricardo	CB	5-11	195	04/18/1982	4	Tusculum
20	Gamble, Chris	CB	6-1	200	03/11/1983	4	Ohio State
43	Harris, Chris	S	6-0	205	08/06/1982	3	Louisiana-Monroe
42	Holt, Terrence	S	6-2	204	03/05/1980	5	North Carolina State
21	Lucas, Ken	CB	6-0	205	01/23/1979	7	Mississippi
31	Marshall, Richard	CB	5-11	189	12/12/1984	2	Fresno State
25	Salley, Nate	S	6-1	216	02/05/1984	1	Ohio State
29	Teal, Quinton	S	6-1	187	03/08/1984	1	Coastal Carolina
23	Wesley, Dante	CB	6-1	210	04/05/1979	6	Arkansas-Pine Bluff
27	Wilson, C.J.	S	6-1	195	04/02/1985	1	Baylor

#	LINEBACKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
50	Anderson, James	LB	6-2	235	09/26/1983	2	Virginia Tech
52	Beason, Jon	LB	6-0	237	01/14/1985	1	Miami (FL)
55	Curry, Donte'	LB	6-1	240	07/22/1978	7	Morris Brown
58	Davis, Thomas	LB	6-0	240	03/22/1983	3	Georgia
53	Diggs, Na'il	LB	6-4	240	07/08/1978	8	Ohio State
57	Jamison, Brandon	LB	6-1	232	07/31/1981	2	West Georgia
54	Johnson, Landon	LB	6-2	232	03/13/1981	4	Purdue
56	Kyle, Jason	LB	6-3	242	05/12/1972	11	Arizona State
59	Seward, Adam	LB	6-2	248	06/15/1982	3	UNLV
97	Shaw, Tim	LB	6-1	236	03/27/1984	1	Penn State

#	KICKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
7	Baker, Jason	P	6-2	205	05/17/1978	7	Iowa
4	Kasay, John	K	5-10	210	10/27/1969	16	Georgia
5	Lloyd, Rhys	K	5-11	231	06/05/1982	1	Minnesota

▶ **JOHN FOX,** *Head coach*

Jeff Davidson, off. coord.; **Mike Trgovac**, def. coord.; **Jim Skipper**, asst. head coach/running backs; **Danny Crossman**, special teams; **Geep Chryst**, tight ends/quality control – offense; **Ken Flajole**, linebackers; **Mike Gillhamer**, secondary/safeties; **Tim Lewis**, secondary; **Dave Magazu**, off. line; **Mike McCoy**, quarterbacks/passing coord.; **Sal Sunseri**, def. line; **Richard Williamson**, wide receivers

CHICAGO BEARS

A lot of questions yet to be answered, beginning with the winner of the QB duel

By Brad Biggs, *Chicago Sun-Times*

For a team that's adamant about not being in a rebuilding phase, Chicago sure is going about business as if it's in the midst of an extreme makeover.

The Bears are plotting a move out of the NFC North cellar with a retooled roster, particularly on offense, where things have been downright lousy. There will be new faces in a huddle led by a quarterback to be determined in camp—Rex Grossman or Kyle Orton—and the hope is the previously dominant defense will rebound. A sturdy defense paired with all-world return man Devin Hester will produce a playoff contender if the ground game is efficient enough to sustain a play-action passing game. Hester's the only given in that equation right now.

"We're definitely not rebuilding," coach Lovie Smith says. "As far as a Super Bowl window, it seems like a long time ago that we played in the Super Bowl. But we like the core of our team still. I feel like we're close. It's a fine line between winning and losing."

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE

(an opponent breaks down the Bears)

"When healthy, their defense is going to be pretty good. They had some problems last year because cornerback Nathan Vasher was hurt and the safety position has been (in) flux since Mike Brown started getting hurt a few years ago. But there are a lot fewer holes on defense. ...

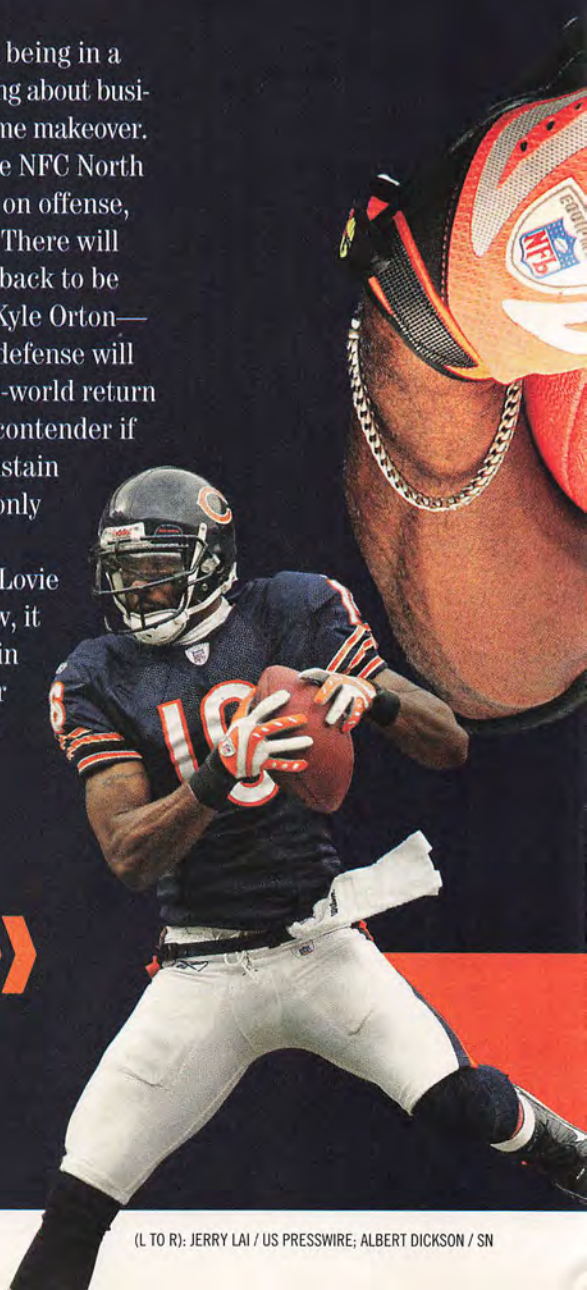
"You look at the offensive line and there's some experience, but they're making at least two changes. I don't know if they have a guy on offense that's going to scare you. The quarterback situation is still a mess. They don't have a guy you're comfortable with throwing the ball, they don't have a guy you feel comfortable with who is going to catch it and you can't rely on the running game. Can they turn around the offense in one season? ...

"I think it can all be fixed if they have a good feeling that the defensive injuries are healed and guys are going to be ready to play. But they have to have some guys perform to be in playoff contention. They can't just get there on defense."

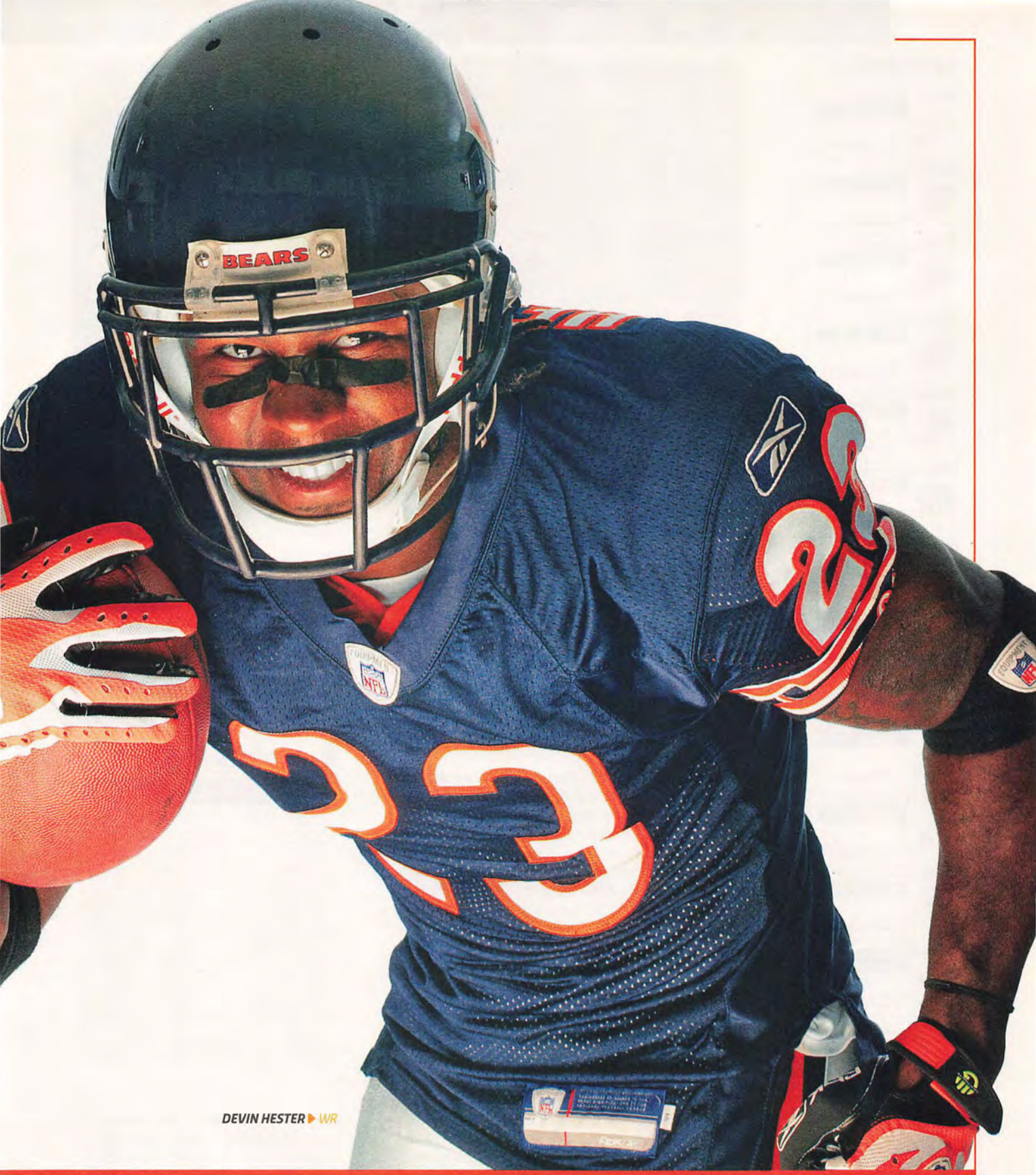
BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

MARK BRADLEY ▸ WR

Bradley went from capturing a starting job a month into his 2005 rookie season to disappearing the last two years following a torn ACL. His path to the lineup was cleared with an offseason shakeup, and he could be the offense's most reliable playmaker.



(L TO R): JERRY LAI / US PRESSWIRE; ALBERT DICKSON / SN



DEVIN HESTER ▶ WR

ONLINE

www.sportingnews.com/nfl/teams/bears
www.chicagobears.com

2007 RECORD

OVERALL: 7-9 ▶ HOME: 4-4

STADIUM

SOLDIER FIELD
Capacity: 61,500
Turf: Grass Tickets: 847-615-2327
Training Camp: Olivet Nazarene University, Bourbonnais, Ill.; 815-928-5821

SN PICK

2

NFC NORTH
(10-6)

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 @ Indianapolis — SEPT. 7 | 8:15 — SCORE (W/L)

WEEK 2 @ Carolina — SEPT. 14 | 1:00 — SCORE (W/L)

WEEK 3 Tampa Bay — SEPT. 21 | 1:00 — SCORE (W/L)

WEEK 4 Philadelphia — SEPT. 28 | 8:15 — SCORE (W/L)

WEEK 5 @ Detroit — OCT. 5 | 1:00 — SCORE (W/L)

WEEK 6 @ Atlanta — OCT. 12 | 1:00 — SCORE (W/L)

WEEK 7 Minnesota — OCT. 19 | 1:00 — SCORE (W/L)

WEEK 8 *OPEN DATE*

WEEK 9 Detroit — NOV. 2 | 1:00 — SCORE (W/L)

WEEK 10 Tennessee — NOV. 9 | 1:00 — SCORE (W/L)

WEEK 11 @ Green Bay — NOV. 16 | 1:00 — SCORE (W/L)

WEEK 12 @ St. Louis — NOV. 23 | 1:00 — SCORE (W/L)

WEEK 13 @ Minnesota — NOV. 30 | 8:15 — SCORE (W/L)

WEEK 14 Jacksonville — DEC. 7 | 1:00 — SCORE (W/L)

WEEK 15 New Orleans — DEC. 11 | 8:15 — SCORE (W/L)

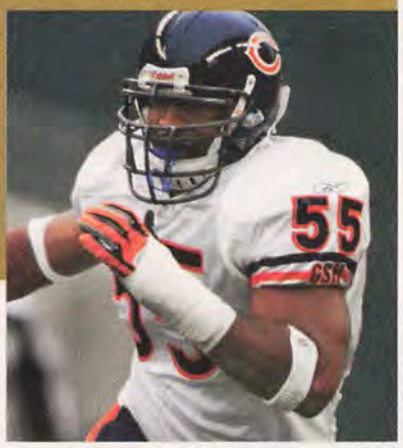
WEEK 16 Green Bay — DEC. 22 | 8:30 — SCORE (W/L)

WEEK 17 @ Houston — DEC. 28 | 1:00 — SCORE (W/L)

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

THE BOOK ON ... LANCE BRIGGS *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"I like his quickness when he has determined (whether it's a) run or pass. His reads are on point, and there's no guessing. When it's pass, he gets back into his zone drop; he gets on his man when it's run. He's quick enough to make the plays in front and behind, to get off of blocks, and he's physical when he gets there. He has a very good sense of his presence relating to routes underneath. He still runs hard to the ball. His body looks a little sloppier—not a lot—but he still performs at a very high level. He can be a little stiff in his hips. The one problem he has is he struggles when getting cut. He never uses his hands when people come to cut him, and he lands flat on his face. That, to me, is the only thing he has trouble with. He's been durable as all hell and, as long as he stays healthy, he's going to be a top player."



OFFENSE

Four starters are gone, including the top playmaker at wide receiver, Bernard Berrian. That's considerable turnover before you get to production issues at quarterback and running back, where former No. 4 overall pick Cedric Benson has been a bust. Chicago is set at tight end and center. Everything else is up for grabs in training camp, and the pressure is on coordinator Ron Turner.

Quarterbacks Grossman returns for his sixth season, but the difference this time is that the club insists the playing field has been leveled for competition with Orton for the starting job. It's not how you want to open camp six weeks from the start of the season, but it's the only way management could bring back the former first-round pick after another wildly inconsistent season. Grossman helped the team to Super Bowl 41 two seasons ago, while Orton was the starter when it won the division the year before.

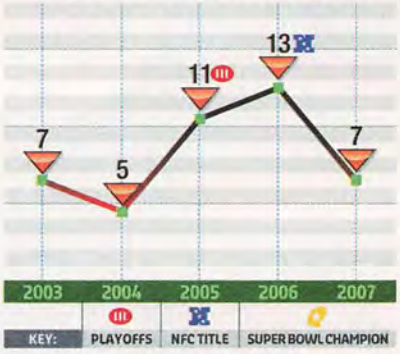
After sitting for more than a year and a half, Orton was steady in his three starts at the end of 2007. He's the safe pick. The feeling is there is greater risk/reward with Grossman, but he will have to prove he can take care of the ball in the preseason.

At least with archrival Green Bay dealing with life after Brett Favre, all the comparisons can end. During his ironman streak, the Bears changed starting quarterbacks 52 times. No permanent solution is in sight, as the club passed on drafting a third passer, citing a poor crop and holes to fill elsewhere. If neither veteran shines, it will be a top priority again for a team that's gone decades searching for a franchise passer. **GRADE: D+**

Running backs If we've learned anything over the past couple of NFL seasons, it's that you don't need a great running back to win. A pretty good one will suffice. The Bears have had two 13-win seasons in recent history with a duo of pretty good backs in Anthony Thomas (2001) and Thomas Jones (2006). The highly touted Benson hasn't measured up to that level yet, as four injuries in three seasons have marred his career. Benson's fractured leg/ankle last season leaves plenty of uncertainty surrounding him, but the club feels much better about the position after getting Tulane's Matt Forte in the draft's second round.

With change-of-pace back Garrett Wolfe and veteran Adrian Peterson also in the mix, the Bears believe their concerns have been addressed and they can resume having success with the power running game their playbook favors. Benson is not without skills, but he hasn't shown a lot of burst or explosion and is routinely dogged by questions about his desire. Forte fits the scheme, and the coaching staff will not be averse to using him early provided he can handle his responsibilities in the passing game, like picking up blitzes. He's the only three-down back on the roster.

5-YEAR WINS TREND



NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	293.3	27
RUSHING	83.1	30
PASSING	210.1	15
SCORING	334	18t
PUNT RETURNS	14.8	2
KICK RETURNS	18.4	32
RED ZONE TD %	40.9	28
TOTAL DEFENSE	354.7	28
AGAINST RUSH	122.9	24
AGAINST PASS	231.8	27
POINTS ALLOWED	348	16
INTERCEPTIONS	16	17t
SACKS	41	6
TURNOVER DIFF.	-1	17t

JAY DROWNS / SN

Look for Wolfe to be used in a role that's more defined after a rookie season in which he was rarely seen. **GRADE: C**

Receivers » At some point Chicago could wind up regretting not slapping the franchise tag on Berrian, who signed as a free agent with rival Minnesota. While success for this group will hinge largely on quarterback play, the Bears could either find a pleasant surprise or have another disaster. Back is the only Chicago receiver to reach the Pro Bowl in the last 36 seasons, Marty Booker. He'll anchor a group as the replacement for veteran Muhsin Muhammad, who was released after three seasons. Electric run-after-the-catch man Mark Bradley has the chance to start, but the former second-round pick has seldom been on the field in three seasons. Devin Hester is the X-factor here. He's working to improve his route-running and understanding of the system so he can do more than run go routes and catch screens.

Brandon Lloyd was signed as a reclamation project in hopes that he'll respond to his former head coach at the University of Illinois, Turner, and the club is excited about the potential of third-round pick Earl Bennett of Vanderbilt. He's viewed as a possession receiver with elusiveness after the catch. Rashied Davis returns as a dependable third-down option.

Reliable tight ends Desmond Clark and Greg Olsen are a nice one-two combination in the passing game, with Olsen expected to see more time in his second season. **GRADE: C-**

Offensive line » Center Olin Kreutz is the anchor of a line in transition. The only consistently steady unit in the past on offense got old and ineffective before the club addressed the matter. As a result, the Bears were forced to select a tackle, Vanderbilt's Chris Williams, in the first round. He has all the athletic tools and makeup to be a fixture on the left side for the next decade, which would halt a long trend of the Bears always seeking a left tackle through free agency.

Tackle John Tait is expected to move back to the right side, where he has experience and can be among the top players in the NFC at the position. Kreutz remains the undisputed leader in the locker room, a hard worker who holds teammates accountable.

While Tait will be replacing Fred Miller, who was released, the plan at left guard is less clear. The club chose not to re-sign nine-time Pro Bowler Ruben Brown and will sort through options that begin with veteran John St. Clair, who

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		
QB	Rex Grossman	Kyle Orton
FB	Jason McKie	Lousaka Polite
RB	Matt Forte	Cedric Benson
WR	Marty Booker	Earl Bennett
WR	Mark Bradley	Devin Hester
TE	Desmond Clark	Greg Olsen
LT	Chris Williams	John St. Clair
LG	John St. Clair	Josh Bekman
C	Olin Kreutz	Anthony Oakley
RG	Roberto Garza	Chester Adams
RT	John Tait	John St. Clair
DEFENSE		
LE	Adewale Ogunleye	Israel Idonije
LT	Tommie Harris	Marcus Harrison
RT	Dusty Dvoracek	Anthony Adams
RE	Alex Brown	Mark Anderson
SLB	Hunter Hillenmeyer	Nick Roach
MLB	Brian Urlacher	Rod Wilson
WLB	Lance Briggs	Jamar Williams
LCB	Charles Tillman	Zackary Bowman
RCB	Nathan Vasher	Ricky Manning Jr.
SS	Brandon McGowan	Kevin Payne
FS	Mike Brown	Danieal Manning
SPECIALISTS		
K	Robbie Gould	
P	Brad Maynard	
KR	Patrick Mannelly	
PR	Devin Hester	
LS	Devin Hester	

BEARS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1 Dick Butkus *(1965-73)*

Known in his day as the most feared player in the game, Butkus is one of the all-time greats at any position.

2 Mike Singletary *(1981-92)*

The most menacing Monster of the Midway, "Samurai Mike" made 10 straight Pro Bowls and was a first-team All-Pro seven times.

3 Brian Urlacher *(2000-present)*

The latest midway monster has racked up 970 tackles, 37.5 sacks, eight forced fumbles, 15 picks and the 2005 Defensive Player of the Year award.

» DRAFT REPORT GRADE ▸ A-

Addressing last year's poor pass protection with their first-round pick, the Bears grabbed LT **Chris Williams**, whose size and athleticism should enable him to step in and start at as a rookie. Chicago then created competition at running back by taking **Matt Forte**, a strong and athletic player who could see immediate time. After losing **Bernard Berrian** in free agency, the Bears added talent at the wideout position in the third and seventh rounds. **Earl Bennett** runs excellent routes and finds a way to get open, while **Marcus Monk** has the size, leaping ability and hands to be an outstanding red-zone receiver. Despite already having quality starting safeties, the Bears grabbed **Craig Steltz** in the fourth round. Steltz may have slipped due to his lack of elite speed but could end up becoming a starter down the road. In the fifth round, the Bears took a player who could turn out to be one of the biggest steals of the draft in CB **Zackary Bowman**. While at Nebraska, Bowman struggled through two major knee injuries in the last two years. However, if he can get back to his pre-injury form, Bowman will be a solid NFL corner. Tight end **Kellen Davis** was a good fifth-round pick due to his size, hands and natural athleticism. The Bears took some gambles in the seventh round on a variety of players who should make the team and have a chance to develop. **Chester Adams** is an athletic guard but needs to improve his technique and consistency to be more than a backup. Linebacker **Joey LaRocque** has the instincts, toughness and speed to chase down plays in pursuit. **Kirk Barton** was a productive right tackle at Ohio State and projects as a solid backup interior offensive lineman.

» 2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
1	14	Williams, Chris	T	6-6	320	Vanderbilt
2	13	Forte, Matt	RB	6-1	224	Tulane
3	7	Bennett, Earl	WR	6-1	202	Vanderbilt
3	27	Harrison, Marcus	DT	6-3	310	Arkansas
4	21	Steltz, Craig	S	6-1	210	LSU
5	7	Bowman, Zackary	CB	6-2	200	Nebraska
5	23	Davis, Kellen	TE	6-7	262	Michigan State
7	1	Baldwin, Ervin	DE	6-2	270	Michigan State
7	15	Adams, Chester	G	6-4	335	Georgia
7	36	LaRocque, Joey	LB	6-2	226	Oregon State
7	40	Barton, Kirk	T	6-5	310	Ohio State
7	41	Monk, Marcus	WR	6-4	222	Arkansas

ROSTER

#	QUARTERBACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
8	Grossman, Rex	QB	6-1	217	08/23/1980	5	Florida
18	Orton, Kyle	QB	6-4	217	11/14/1982	2	Purdue

#	OFFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
67	Beekman, Josh	G	6-2	310	06/30/1983	1	Boston College
63	Garza, Roberto	G	6-2	310	03/26/1979	7	Texas A&M-Kingsville
57	Kreutz, Olin	C	6-2	292	06/09/1977	10	Washington
65	Mannelly, Patrick	T	6-5	265	04/18/1975	10	Duke
60	Metcalf, Terrence	G	6-4	318	01/28/1978	6	Mississippi
68	Oakley, Anthony	G	6-4	298	08/16/1981	1	Western Kentucky
64	Reed, Tyler	G	6-4	307	10/06/1982	0	Penn State
78	St. Clair, John	T	6-5	315	07/31/1977	6	Virginia
76	Tait, John	T	6-6	312	01/26/1975	9	Brigham Young

#	RUNNING BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
32	Benson, Cedric	RB	5-11	220	12/28/1982	3	Texas
37	McKie, Jason	RB	5-11	243	05/22/1980	6	Temple
29	Peterson, Adrian	RB	5-10	210	07/01/1979	6	Georgia Southern
39	Polite, Lousaka	RB	6-0	242	09/14/1981	4	Pittsburgh
47	Pope, P.J.	RB	5-9	212	02/26/1984	1	Bowling Green
48	Runnels, J.D.	RB	5-11	240	06/19/1984	1	Oklahoma
25	Wolfe, Garrett	RB	5-7	186	08/17/1984	1	Northern Illinois

#	RECEIVERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
86	Booker, Marty	WR	6-0	210	07/31/1976	9	Louisiana-Monroe
16	Bradley, Mark	WR	6-2	200	01/29/1982	3	Oklahoma
88	Clark, Desmond	TE	6-3	249	04/20/1977	9	Wake Forest
81	Davis, Rashied	WR	5-9	187	07/24/1979	3	San Jose State
83	Hass, Mike	WR	6-1	208	01/02/1983	1	Oregon State
23	Hester, Devin	WR	5-11	189	11/04/1982	2	Miami (FL)
80	Lloyd, Brandon	WR	6-0	200	07/05/1981	5	Illinois
89	Mines, Fontel	TE	6-4	244	02/26/1985	0	Virginia
82	Olsen, Greg	TE	6-5	252	03/11/1985	1	Miami (FL)
84	Rideau, Brandon	WR	6-3	200	10/18/1982	0	Kansas

#	DEFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
95	Adams, Anthony	DT	6-0	297	06/18/1980	5	Penn State
97	Anderson, Mark	DE	6-4	255	05/26/1983	2	Alabama
73	Bazuin, Daniel	DE	6-3	272	07/22/1983	0	Central Michigan
96	Brown, Alex	DE	6-3	260	06/04/1979	6	Florida
98	Dvoracek, Dusty	DT	6-3	303	03/03/1981	1	Oklahoma
91	Harris, Tommie	DT	6-3	295	04/29/1983	4	Oklahoma
71	Idonije, Israel	DT	6-6	275	11/17/1980	4	Manitoba
93	Ogunleye, Adewale	DE	6-4	260	08/09/1977	7	Indiana
70	Oshinowo, Babatunde	DT	6-1	325	01/14/1983	2	Stanford
75	Toeaina, Matt	DT	6-3	301	10/09/1982	1	Oregon

#	DEFENSIVE BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
30	Brown, Mike	S	5-10	207	02/13/1978	8	Nebraska
43	Gattis, Josh	S	6-1	207	01/15/1984	1	Wake Forest
21	Graham, Corey	CB	6-0	195	07/25/1985	1	New Hampshire
38	Manning, Danieal	S	5-11	201	08/09/1982	2	Abilene Christian
24	Manning Jr., Ricky	CB	5-9	188	11/18/1980	5	UCLA
26	McBride, Trumaine	CB	5-9	185	09/24/1985	1	Mississippi
36	McGowan, Brandon	S	5-11	205	09/16/1983	3	Maine
44	Payne, Kevin	S	6-0	212	12/05/1983	1	Louisiana-Monroe
45	Peters, Leonard	S	6-1	199	12/26/1981	0	Hawaii
33	Tillman, Charles	CB	6-1	196	02/23/1981	5	Louisiana-Lafayette
31	Vasher, Nathan	CB	5-10	180	11/17/1981	4	Texas

#	LINEBACKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
55	Briggs, Lance	LB	6-1	240	11/12/1980	5	Arizona
92	Hillenmeyer, Hunter	LB	6-4	238	10/28/1980	5	Vanderbilt
58	McClover, Darrell	LB	6-1	226	08/25/1981	3	Miami (FL)
62	Okwo, Michael	LB	5-11	232	01/24/1985	0	Stanford
53	Roach, Nick	LB	6-0	234	06/16/1985	1	Northwestern
54	Urlacher, Brian	LB	6-4	258	05/25/1978	8	New Mexico
52	Williams, Jamar	LB	6-0	230	06/14/1984	2	Arizona State
59	Wilson, Rod	LB	6-2	230	11/12/1981	2	South Carolina

#	KICKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
9	Gould, Robbie	K	6-0	181	12/06/1982	3	Penn State
4	Maynard, Brad	P	6-1	186	02/09/1974	11	Ball State
10	Pakulak, Glenn	P	6-3	220	04/09/1980	0	Kentucky

▶ **LOVIE SMITH,** *Head coach*

Ron Turner, off. coord.; **Bob Babich**, def. coord.; **Dave Toub**, special teams coord.; **Pep Hamilton**, quarterbacks; **Rob Boras**, tight ends; **Darryl Drake**, wide receivers; **Tim Spencer**, running backs; **Harry Hiestand**, off. line; **Luke Butkus**, off. line asst.; **Brick Haley**, def. line; **Steven Wilks**, def. backs; **Gill Byrd**, asst. def. backs/safeties; **Lloyd Lee**, linebackers

finished last season in the spot. Terrence Metcalf has had chances and not capitalized on them, while Josh Beekman may not get strong consideration because the club would hesitate to put a fourth-round pick from 2007 next to a rookie like Williams. Roberto Garza is durable at right guard. **GRADE: C+**

DEFENSE

The Bears went from being a top-five defense to a bottom-five unit last season as problems arose through the middle. Depth issues persisted at tackle, and another serious injury to free safety Mike Brown hampered coordinator Bob Babich's bunch. With an arthritic back, middle linebacker Brian Urlacher has health concerns of his own. He's coming off of neck surgery but remained on top of his game at the end of last season and is central to an outfit that wants to return to prominence.

Defensive line The biggest problem with the defensive front is that it needs to play in a rotation and, unfortunately, tackle Tommie Harris is so talented that the Bears have given him little rest and worn him down at the end of the last two seasons. He makes so many plays that it's hard to take him out of a game. Add that to the issues created when the team ditched troubled Tank Johnson a year ago, and this has been a line in flux.

The Bears are confident the unit will return to its dominant ways, though. Harris is healthy and will be complemented by fellow tackle Dusty Dvoracek, who's back from a torn ACL, and third-round pick Marcus Harrison, who was a disruptive force in the SEC for Arkansas. Right end Alex Brown is in a struggle to win back his starting job from pass-rush specialist Mark Anderson. Left end Adewale Ogunleye was the most consistent performer among the front seven last season.

Dvoracek and Anthony Adams can combine to shore up the nose-tackle spot, and look for Israel Idonije to be utilized more. Dan Bazuin, a second-round pick in 2007 who sat out his rookie year with a knee injury, is also expected to contribute, so this could be an area of strength for the Bears. **GRADE: B+**

Linebackers This remains one of the strongest positions on the team because the starting unit is entering its fifth season together. Urlacher's arthritic lower-back condition is a real concern, however. If there was one thing he and fellow perennial Pro Bowler Lance Briggs did last season, it was learn to play through injuries. Hunter Hillenmeyer does not receive enough

OFFSEASON MOVES

ADDITIONS:

WR **Marty Booker** *(FA/Dolphins)*, WR **Brandon Lloyd** *(FA/Redskins)*

SUBTRACTIONS:

WR **Muhsin Muhammad** *(FA/Panthers)*, DT **Darwin Walker** *(FA/Panthers)*, T **Fred Miller** *(FA)*, TE **John Gilmore** *(FA/Buccaneers)*, WR **Bernard Berrian** *(FA/Vikings)*, LB **Brendon Ayanbadejo** *(FA/Ravens)*, DE **Antonio Garay** *(FA)*, G **Ruben Brown** *(FA)*, S **Adam Archuleta** *(FA)*

INSIDE THE HEADSET

LOVIE SMITH

Smith believes in delegating responsibilities to his staff and is not afraid to go to battle with young players. Look for the offensive additions in the draft to be thrown into the fire as Smith tries his proven formula of winning with defense, field position and special teams.

HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL

FANTASY SPIN

http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football

URLACHER BENSON BRADLEY

A whipping boy at quarterback, no bona fide No. 1 wideout and an injury-prone running back ... the offensive pickings are slim. But IDP owners have strong options.

$ BUY Brian Urlacher, LB

SELL Cedric Benson, RB

Z SLEEPER Mark Bradley, WR

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/09	L	3-14	at San Diego Chargers
09/16	W	20-10	Kansas City Chiefs
09/23	L	10-34	Dallas Cowboys
09/30	L	27-37	at Detroit Lions
10/07	W	27-20	at Green Bay Packers
10/14	L	31-34	Minnesota Vikings
10/21	W	19-16	at Philadelphia Eagles
10/28	L	7-16	Detroit Lions
11/11	W	17-6	at Oakland Raiders
11/18	L	23-30	at Seattle Seahawks
11/25	W	37-34	Denver Broncos
12/02	L	16-21	New York Giants
12/06	L	16-24	at Washington Redskins
12/17	L	13-20	at Minnesota Vikings
12/23	W	35-7	Green Bay Packers
12/30	W	33-25	New Orleans Saints

WON 7, LOST 9

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Benson	196	674	3.4	43t	4
Peterson	151	510	3.4	21	3
Wolfe	31	85	2.7	25	0
Griese	13	28	2.2	9	0
Grossman	14	27	1.9	12	0
McKie	6	17	2.8	6	1
Orton	5	-1	-0.2	1	0
Hester	7	-10	-1.4	5	0
BEARS	**423**	**1330**	**3.1**	**43t**	**8**
OPPONENTS	454	1967	4.3	73t	17

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Berrian	71	951	13.4	59t	5
Peterson	51	420	8.2	30	0
Clark	44	545	12.4	52	4
Muhammad	40	570	14.3	44	3
Olsen	39	391	10.0	31	2
Hester	20	299	15.0	81t	2
Benson	17	123	7.2	19	0
Davis	17	165	9.7	36	0
McKie	9	33	3.7	10	0
Wolfe	9	117	13.0	33	0
Bradley	6	71	11.8	19t	1
Gilmore	3	14	4.7	7	0
St. Clair	1	2	2.0	2t	1
BEARS	**327**	**3701**	**11.3**	**81t**	**18**
OPPONENTS	343	3953	11.5	71	19

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Griese	262	161	1803	10	12
Grossman	225	122	1411	4	7
Orton	80	43	478	3	2
Gould	1	0	0	0	0
Peterson	1	1	9	1	0
BEARS	**569**	**327**	**3701**	**18**	**21**
OPPONENTS	541	343	3953	19	16

SACKS BEARS 41, OPPONENTS 43

Ogunleye 9, Harris 8, Anderson 5, Urlacher 5, Brown 4.5, Archuleta 2, Briggs 2, Manning Jr. 1, Vasher 1, Walker 1, Williams 1, Adams 0.5

credit for the work he does on the strong side.

A couple of interesting developments are worth keeping an eye on, though, beginning with how the chemistry will be if Urlacher remains unhappy with his contract, which was a major issue for the organization in the offseason. It's also worth watching to see if a club that's always in love with its draft picks will push third-year man Jamar Williams—he was thought to be the heir apparent to Briggs on the weak side before Briggs re-signed as a free agent—to challenge Hillenmeyer. The Bears have been drafting to replace Briggs for a few seasons and, now that he's in Chicago for the long haul, they may want to see what their investments in Williams and Mike Okwo are worth despite the fact that Hillenmeyer has been invaluable. **GRADE: A**

Secondary Although repeated injuries have left the defense in a bind, Chicago will go to the well one more time with Brown, a gamer at free safety when healthy who has impeccable credentials as a leader. It's a last chance for Brown, who tore an ACL last year in the season opener and has been decimated by injuries for four straight seasons after not missing a game in his first four campaigns. But when he was lost—and after the club had traded away steady Chris Harris to Carolina—there was a gaping hole after free-agent pickup Adam Archuleta flopped and rookie Kevin Payne was injured.

Brandon McGowan figures to battle with Payne on the strong side, and there are high hopes for fourth-round pick Craig Steltz, who has been likened to former Bear safety Doug Plank, the heavy hitter from a generation ago who achieved cult status in Chicago.

Any questions about cornerback Nathan Vasher's value were answered when he missed 12 games with a groin injury last year. When healthy, he and Charles Tillman form one of the best corner pairs in the NFC. Vasher is a playmaker and Tillman doesn't get near the recognition he deserves.

Nickel corner Ricky Manning Jr. has fallen out of favor. Trumaine McBride made the most of his skills as a rookie but has size limitations. Rookie Zack Bowman could be pushed ahead of Manning and McBride early in the season. **GRADE:B-**

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Bears saw about every gimmick imaginable when it came to opponents trying to keep the ball out of Hester's hands last season—from bloops and squibs to intentional kicks out of bounds. It didn't stop the electric return man from continuing his assault on the record books, as creative special-teams coordinator Dave Toub hatched new plans as the season wore on. While there's been talk of Hester's role here being reduced as he's integrated more into the offense, Chicago will never take him away from doing what he's best at—zigzagging his way downfield.

Replacing two-time Pro Bowl coverage man Brendon Ayanbadejo will be a tall order for Toub's unit, which led the league the last two seasons.

Placekicker Robbie Gould remains nearly automatic inside 50 yards despite playing half of his games in the elements along the windy lakefront. Toub would like to see him get better distance on kickoffs.

Brad Maynard isn't the best fit as a directional punter in a sometimes-treacherous outdoor stadium, but he has been a model of consistency. The hulking Idonije is a force to be reckoned with on coverage, and he led the league with three blocked kicks. Reserve linebacker Nick Roach could flourish in coverage. Long snapper Pat Mannelly is a model of consistency. **GRADE: A**

BOTTOM LINE

For the first time in the Lovie Smith era, the Bears do not have roster continuity. Chicago has not been able to develop much in the way of offensive players and will now have to do so in a hurry, putting pressure on the winner of the Grossman-Orton QB duel. The team found out what the funk is like for Super Bowl losers and is desperately seeking to get back in contention. Bad karma and gaping lineup holes, however, will make a third division title in four years a reach.

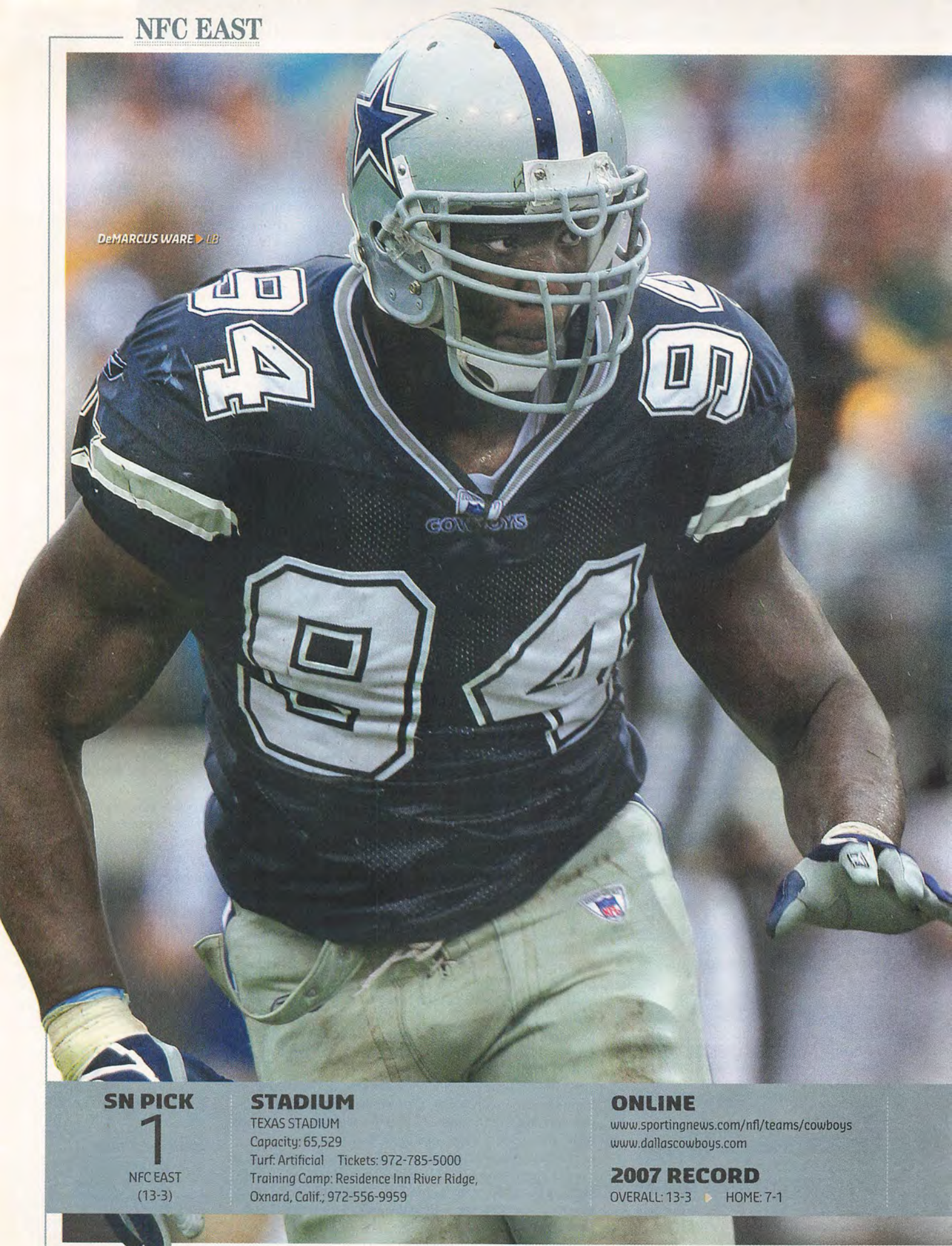
87

FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT

DOWN

HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL



SN PICK
1
NFC EAST
(13-3)

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2007 RECORD
OVERALL: 13-3 ▶ HOME: 7-1

(L TO R): ALBERT DICKSON / SN; JAMES D. SMITH / ICON SMI; HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL

DALLAS COWBOYS

To keep up with these Joneses, you need at least 13 Pro Bowlers

By Jean-Jacques Taylor, *Dallas Morning News*

Jerry Jones has never been more frustrated than he is right now.

Or motivated.

Last season, the Cowboys left him despondent after tying the franchise record with 13 wins, earning home-field advantage throughout the playoffs and sending a league-record 13 players to the Pro Bowl—only to lose in the first round of the playoffs.

That it occurred to the eventual champs—the New York Giants—didn't make him feel any better.

So Jones has made up his mind to do whatever he can to end the Cowboys' embarrassing streak of 11 consecutive seasons without a playoff win.

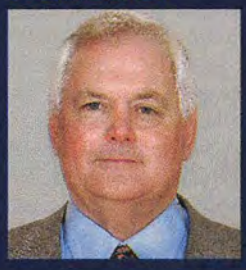
There's no reason it shouldn't end this year because the Cowboys are among the league's most talented teams, and that was before Jones added Zach Thomas in free agency for leadership,

BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

ANTHONY SPENCER ▸ OLB

A first-round pick last year, Spencer saw limited playing time because Wade Phillips prefers to bring rookies along slowly and Greg Ellis' recovery from a ruptured Achilles tendon was much faster than anticipated. Spencer will play much more this year and the Cowboys hope his quick first step will allow him to be an important part of their pass rush. Dallas would love to use Ellis, Spencer and DeMarcus Ware together in certain schemes to get all of three of its quality pass rushers on the field at once.

INSIDE THE HEADSET



WADE PHILLIPS

The Cowboys have one of the NFL's most aggressive staffs. Phillips is definitely a players' coach. When it comes to strategy, he believes in pressure defense. He's a 3-4 expert and attacks the quarterback with the belief that when they're under duress, they make mistakes. Offensive coordinator Jason Garrett is equally aggressive. He likes to throw the ball vertically, especially in non-traditional throwing situations. Garrett doesn't use many trick plays, preferring to let the talent of his players do much of the heavy lifting.

OFFSEASON MOVES

ADDITIONS:

LB **Zach Thomas** *(FA/Dolphins)*,
CB **Pacman Jones** *(trade/Titans)*

SUBTRACTIONS:

RB **Oliver Hoyte** *(FA/Chiefs)*,
RB **Tyson Thompson** *(FA)*, DB **Nathan Jones** *(FA/Dolphins)*, RB **Julius Jones** *(FA/Seahawks)*, S **Keith Davis** *(FA/Dolphins)*, DB **Jacques Reeves** *(FA/Texans)*

controversial but talented Pacman Jones and a pair of highly regarded first-round picks in speedy running back Felix Jones and cornerback Mike Jenkins.

The Cowboys certainly look ready to win a playoff game this year, but it's clear Jones has his sights set on something higher than that.

He wants to hold the Lombardi Trophy for the fourth time in his life.

OFFENSE

Coordinator Jason Garrett believes in using a multiple offense that's built around a power running game and deep passing attack. Dallas doesn't use much motion or shifting—compared to teams like Washington—because it has so much talent. Garrett just wants to get the ball in the hands of his playmakers so their talent can flow. Dallas threw the ball 54.5 percent of the time last season, and there's no reason to think that trend will change this year, because Tony Romo is such an accurate passer and so adept at avoiding pressure. But at the end of games, Garrett is stubborn about giving running back Marion Barber a chance to close it out, especially if there are fewer than four minutes left in the contest.

Quarterbacks » In his first year as a full-time starter, Romo proved his 2006 performance was no fluke. Shattering team records on what seemed like a weekly basis in the second half of the season, he passed for 4,211 yards with 36 touchdowns and 19 interceptions. He should be even better this year.

As Romo gets more experience against the complex zone defenses teams showed him last year, he has a chance to complete even more than the 64.4 percent of his passes that he did last year. The best aspect of Romo's game is that he tends to learn from his mistakes. The only problem for Dallas is that it hasn't acquired a solid backup. Veteran Brad Johnson, 39, is the current No. 2. **GRADE: B+**

Running backs » Jerry Jones hasn't felt this good about his running backs since Emmitt Smith was toting the football. Barber emerged as one of the league's stars last year while sharing the position with Julius Jones. Barber's powerful, slashing style netted 975 yards, a 4.8 average and 10 touchdowns on only 204 carries. As the starter this year, Barber should get a few more carries, but the Cowboys want him fresh for the fourth quarters of games and in December. That's why Dallas used a first-round pick (No. 22) on rookie Felix Jones. The Cowboys view him as the perfect complement to Barber because he's a speed runner who can attack the perimeter. At Arkansas, Jones shared the position with Darren McFadden, the fourth player selected in the draft. Even so, he managed to rush for more than 2,200 yards in his two seasons with the Razorbacks. Last year, he averaged 8.7 yards per carry and had three runs of 70 yards or more.

This could be a breakout season for fullback Deon Anderson, a terrific blocker who understands angles and plays with a tenacity that his coaches and teammates love. **GRADE: B+**

Receivers » The one regret the Cowboys' personnel department has entering the season is that it couldn't upgrade its corps of receivers. It wasn't from a lack of trying.

5-YEAR WINS TREND

NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	365.7	3
RUSHING	109.1	17
PASSING	256.6	4
SCORING	455	2
PUNT RETURNS	8.7	17
KICK RETURNS	22.3	19
RED ZONE TD %	53.6	15
TOTAL DEFENSE	307.6	9
AGAINST RUSH	94.6	6
AGAINST PASS	213.1	13
POINTS ALLOWED	19	6t
INTERCEPTIONS	325	13
SACKS	46	3
TURNOVER DIFF.	+5	8t

The Cowboys made inquiries—officially and unofficially—about the availability of Cincinnati's Chad Johnson, Detroit's Roy Williams and Arizona's Anquan Boldin, but didn't come close to getting anything done. So they will enter training camp hoping that 34-year-old Terrell Owens will remain one of the game's elite wideouts. He showed no sign of slowing down last season with 81 catches for 1,355 yards and a franchise-record 15 touchdowns. The problem is the Cowboys don't have someone to complement him.

Terry Glenn, 33, missed the first 15 games of 2007 with a knee injury. He spent the offseason rehabbing, and the Cowboys expect him to play. They just don't know whether he'll have the same burst and acceleration to consistently run past defensive backs. Patrick Crayton is a nice slot receiver,

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		
QB	Tony Romo	Brad Johnson
FB	Deon Anderson	Ronnie Cruz
RB	Marion Barber	Felix Jones
WR	Terrell Owens	Sam Hurd
WR	Patrick Crayton	Miles Austin
TE	Jason Witten	Martellus Bennett
LT	Flozell Adams	Pat McQuistan
LG	Kyle Kosier	Joe Berger
C	Andre Gurode	Cory Procter
RG	Leonard Davis	Joe Berger
RT	Marc Colombo	James Marten
DEFENSE		
LE	Marcus Spears	Stephen Bowen
DT	Jay Ratliff	Tank Johnson
RE	Chris Canty	Jason Hatcher
OLB	DeMarcus Ware	Anthony Spencer
ILB	Bradie James	Kevin Burnett
ILB	Zach Thomas	Bobby Carpenter
OLB	Greg Ellis	Anthony Spencer
LCB	Anthony Henry	Pacman Jones
SS	Roy Williams	Pat Watkins
FS	Ken Hamlin	Pat Watkins
RCB	Terence Newman	Mike Jenkins
SPECIALISTS		
K	Nick Folk	
P	Mat McBriar	
KR	Felix Jones	
PR	Patrick Crayton	
LS	L.P. Ladouceur	

FANTASY SPIN

http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football

ROMO ELLIS CRAYTON

The presence of tight end Jason Witten makes wideout Terrell Owens all the more dangerous. Teams can't lock down on both guys in the red zone, meaning one of them will always be open.

$ ***BUY*** »	Tony Romo, QB
» ***SELL*** »	Greg Ellis, LB
Z ***SLEEPER*** »	Patrick Crayton, WR

HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL

DRAFT REPORT GRADE ▶ A-

With two first-round picks, the Cowboys were poised to add some solid players, and things couldn't have worked out better for them. After losing RB Julius Jones in free agency, Dallas needed a replacement in the backfield and ended up with one of its top targets in **Felix Jones**. He has the inside running skills, elusiveness and the receiving prowess to be the ideal complement to Marion Barber's hard-nosed, aggressive running style.

Cornerback was a position the Cowboys targeted with their other first-round pick (No. 25 overall), as they expected to be choosing among the likes of Aqib Talib and Antoine Cason. However, Dallas got a steal when **Mike Jenkins** slid. Jenkins is a very smooth and fluid athlete who was viewed by many as the most complete corner in the draft.

JONES ▶ RB

The Cowboys surprised some by using their second-round pick to grab TE **Martellus Bennett**, who will replace the traded Anthony Fasano. Bennett is tall and athletic and has the combination of strong blocking and receiving skills that is hard to find. He will be the backup to Jason Witten. Dallas grabbed another tailback, **Tashard Choice**, in the fourth round. The Cowboys like Choice's versatility, but he could provide insurance if Barber leaves as a free agent in 2009.

Dallas' fifth-round pick, CB **Orlando Scandrick**, could be a great late find. He is highly competitive with very quick feet and the playing speed to run with nearly any receiver. The Cowboys took a gamble on Middle Tennessee State's **Erik Walden**. He may not fit most NFL schemes, but in Dallas' aggressive 3-4 defense, Walden's pass-rush skills could help him stick on the roster.

2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
1	22	Jones, Felix	RB	6-0	200	Arkansas
1	25	Jenkins, Mike	CB	6-0	197	South Florida
2	30	Bennett, Martellus	TE	6-7	253	Texas A&M
4	23	Choice, Tashard	RB	5-11	215	Georgia Tech
5	8	Scandrick, Orlando	CB	5-11	187	Boise State
6	1	Walden, Erik	DE	6-2	238	Middle Tennessee

but he doesn't have the speed to threaten opponents deep.

The Cowboys do feel good about their tight ends, especially with perennial Pro Bowler Jason Witten leading the way. But the team wants to use more formations with two tight ends, so they drafted Texas A&M's Martellus Bennett in the second round.

GRADE: A

Offensive line You don't have one of the NFL's most prolific offenses without one of its best offensive lines. So no one should have been surprised when Dallas sent left tackle Flozell Adams, center Andre Gurode and right guard Leonard Davis to the Pro Bowl. The best move the Cowboys made in the offseason was re-signing Adams to a long-term deal to ensure that Romo's blind side is adequately protected for the next six years. Davis, who signed a huge contract last year worth nearly $50 million, proved to be worth every nickel. He helped set a physical tone for the running game and did a nice job protecting Romo as the Cowboys surpassed the 30-point mark eight times.

Gurode was steady and did a much better job of making line calls and blocking assignments. He's made considerable strides with the cerebral part of the job. When you combine that with his physical talent, it's easy to see why he has been to the last two Pro Bowls.

Right tackle Marc Columbo was solid last season, as was left guard Kyle Kosier, but the Cowboys have spent a lot of draft picks on offensive linemen the past few seasons. That means they're getting depth, which suggests that they should be able to eventually replace them with cheaper players already on their roster. Pat McQuistan will challenge Kosier for a starting job in training camp. **GRADE: A**

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE *(an opponent breaks down the Cowboys)*

"They have clearly improved a lot since last season. While Tony Romo can improve his consistency, he has shown that he can make all the throws and has a knack for making big plays in key situations.

"When they lost Julius Jones in free agency, many questioned how they would replace his half of the Jones/Barber combo. Now running back is definitely a position of strength after drafting Felix Jones. Jones gives them a complement to (Marion) Barber's aggressive running style. ...

"Everybody expected them to add a big receiver in the draft, but they didn't draft anyone high and feel they have some young receivers to develop. Owens is their primary target at receiver, but Jason Witten is their best option. ....

"The switch from Bill Parcells to Wade Phillips was not a big deal for the defense because they continued to play a 34 defense. What is not known by too many outside the NFL is that they both use different 34 defenses, which is a big part of the reason the Cowboys' pass rush improved so much in 2007. In Phillips' 34, the defense is predicated on quickness."

JAMES D. SMITH / ICON SMI

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1	@ Cleveland	SEPT. 7	4:15
WEEK 2	Philadelphia	SEPT. 15	8:30
WEEK 3	@ Green Bay	SEPT. 21	8:15
WEEK 4	Washington	SEPT. 28	4:15
WEEK 5	Cincinnati	OCT. 5	4:15
WEEK 6	@ Arizona	OCT. 12	4:15
WEEK 7	@ St. Louis	OCT. 19	1:00
WEEK 8	Tampa Bay	OCT. 26	1:00
WEEK 9	@ New York Giants	NOV. 2	4:15
WEEK 10	*OPEN DATE*		
WEEK 11	@ Washington	NOV. 16	8:15
WEEK 12	San Francisco	NOV. 23	1:00
WEEK 13	Seattle	NOV. 27	4:15
WEEK 14	@ Pittsburgh	DEC. 7	4:15
WEEK 15	New York Giants	DEC. 14	8:15
WEEK 16	Baltimore	DEC. 20	8:15
WEEK 17	@ Philadelphia	DEC. 28	1:00

W / L / SCORE

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

DEFENSE

Head coach Wade Phillips, an expert at creating pressure from the 3-4, calls nearly all of the Cowboys' defensive signals. But he gets a lot of game-plan help from second-year defensive coordinator Brian Stewart. Under Phillips and Stewart, the Cowboys play a one-gap scheme built on pressure. They try to put outside linebackers DeMarcus Ware and Greg Ellis in position to pressure the quarterback, and the duo combined for 26.5 sacks last year and were both Pro Bowl selections. Phillips really likes to use first-down blitzes in hopes of creating long-yardage situations on second and third down.

Defensive line » A full season from Tank Johnson combined with the continued development of starting nose guard Jay Ratliff and end Chris Canty should give the Cowboys their best defensive line in more than a decade. Ratliff, who signed a five-year deal worth $20 million near the end of last season, is a high-character, high-motor player who is always around the football. He sets the tone for the line, and is the kind of disruptive force every 3-4 defense needs at the nose. He should get considerable help from Johnson, who was suspended for the first eight games last season for violating the league's player-conduct policy. Johnson will give Dallas the versatility to rush with a four-man line in nickel situations because he can line up as a three-technique.

The line will be among the best in the NFL if Marcus Spears can ever develop into the disruptive force the Cowboys thought he would become when they spent a first-round pick on him in 2005. He had just 30 tackles and two sacks last season.

THE BOOK ON ... ROY WILLIAMS *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"First, he's not as bad in coverage as everyone thinks. He has some flaws, but the Cowboys don't do a good job of keeping those hidden and they expose him, especially in quarters (cover 4), where he sometimes has to cover a receiver 40 yards down the field. He's much better underneath, where even if he gets beat, there's plenty of help behind him to keep it from being a big play.

"Roy can be good in coverage because he's been good in the past. But he has to be technically sound. Too many times, he's not. He doesn't stay low enough in his backpedal and he has stiff hips. If he's low, then he can quickly get in and out of breaks and stay with the man he's covering.

"He also needs to do more film study, because he's not an instinctive player. The more he studies, the more familiar he can become with different route combinations and the more he can anticipate certain routes given the down and distance."

COWBOYS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1 » **Lee Roy Jordan** *(1963-76)*

Five-time Pro Bowler finished his career as the club's all-time leading tackler and was as tough, smart and as physical as they come.

2 » **Chuck Howley** *(1961-73)*

The only man from a losing team to be named Super Bowl MVP was a fantastic athlete with tremendous instincts and made first-team All-Pro five times.

3 » **DeMarcus Ware** *(2005-present)*

An outstanding pass rusher who's athletic enough to drop into coverage when neeeded and tough enough to play the run at the point of attack. He will probably be the finest linebacker in club history by the end of his career.

Canty, meanwhile, a fourth-round pick also selected in 2005, is on the verge of becoming a star after registering 43 tackles and 3.5 sacks last season. He's terrific against the run and has developed into a much better pass rusher than the Cowboys had expected. **GRADE: B**

Linebackers » As is should be with the 3-4 defense, the Cowboys' linebackers are the key. It all starts with Ware, who will get strong consideration for Defensive Player of the Year this season. He's a physical freak who combines speed, athleticism and power to overwhelm offenses. He had 14 sacks last year, and no one will be surprised if he exceeds that total in 2008. But Ware is not a one-dimensional player. He can cover running backs and tight ends and is a force against the run whether he's chasing plays down from the back side or being strong at the point of attack.

Ellis is the Cowboys' strongside linebacker. The converted defensive end had 12.5 sacks last season and is the perfect complement to Ware. Teams double team and chip Ware on nearly every passing play, which means Ellis sees a lot of man-to-man blocking. Most right tackles can't handle him one-on-one, so it gives Ellis an opportunity to be a dominant player. Then there's 2007 first-round pick Anthony Spencer, who had 36 tackles, three sacks and two forced fumbles in limited playing time. The Cowboys will try to turn Spencer, who has a tremendous first step, loose this season. Dallas will have some packages where Ellis, Ware and Spencer are on the field at the same time.

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/09	W	45-35	New York Giants
09/16	W	37-20	at Miami Dolphins
09/23	W	34-10	at Chicago Bears
09/30	W	35-7	St. Louis Rams
10/08	W	25-24	at Buffalo Bills
10/14	L	27-48	New England Patriots
10/21	W	24-14	Minnesota Vikings
11/04	W	38-17	at Philadelphia Eagles
11/11	W	31-20	at New York Giants
11/18	W	28-23	Washington Redskins
11/22	W	34-3	New York Jets
11/29	W	37-27	Green Bay Packers
12/09	W	28-27	at Detroit Lions
12/16	L	6-10	Philadelphia Eagles
12/22	W	20-13	at Carolina Panthers
12/30	L	6-27	at Washington Redskins

WON 13, LOST 3

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Barber	204	975	4.8	54	10
Jones	164	588	3.6	25	2
Romo	31	129	4.2	17	2
Thompson	14	54	3.9	23	0
Owens	1	5	5.0	5	0
Johnson	5	-5	-1.0	0	0
COWBOYS	**419**	**1746**	**4.2**	**54**	**14**
OPPONENTS	381	1513	4.0	62t	12

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Witten	96	1145	11.9	53	7
Owens	81	1355	16.7	52t	15
Crayton	50	697	13.9	59t	7
Barber	44	282	6.4	29	2
Jones	23	203	8.8	24	0
Hurd	19	314	16.5	51t	1
Fasano	14	143	10.2	26t	1
Anderson	6	55	9.2	17	0
Austin	5	76	15.2	35	0
Curtis	3	18	6.0	15t	3
Hoyte	1	2	2.0	2	0
COWBOYS	**342**	**4290**	**12.5**	**59t**	**36**
OPPONENTS	342	3728	10.9	69t	19

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Romo	520	335	4211	36	19
Johnson	11	7	79	0	0
COWBOYS	**531**	**342**	**4290**	**36**	**19**
OPPONENTS	581	342	3728	19	19

SACKS — **COWBOYS 46, OPPONENTS 25**

Ware 14, Ellis 12.5, Canty 3.5, James 3, Ratliff 3, Spencer 3, Hatcher 2, Johnson 2, Spears 2, Jones 1

ROBERT SEALE / SN

Inside linebackers Bradie James and Thomas (if he can stay healthy) should make Dallas strong against the run. The Cowboys will play Thomas on the weak side because there's less traffic there, and they feel confident that Canty will keep some offensive linemen off of him so he can flow to the ball and make more plays. **GRADE: A**

Secondary The book on the Cowboys was pretty easy to read: spread them out and pick them apart. Only the prolific nature of the Cowboys' offense kept Dallas from losing more than three games. So Jones spent the offseason trying to upgrade the secondary. It started with his single-minded pursuit of Pacman Jones, even though he was in the midst of an indefinite suspension by commissioner Roger Goodell. Jerry Jones wanted Pacman because the risk/reward is negligible. Dallas spent a fourth-round pick and a sixth next year for one of the top players in the league, when he's allowed to play.

With the addition of South Florida corner Jenkins in the draft, the Cowboys can now easily match up when offenses go four or five wide. The move will also allow Dallas to shift Anthony Henry from cornerback to free safety in their nickel and dime defenses, which would make Roy Williams a two-down player. Terence Newman, coming off a Pro Bowl season, is entering the final year of his contract, so he has incentive to put together another outstanding season. Then there's Ken Hamlin, who signed the franchise tender, giving him the average salary of the five highest-paid safeties in the league. He's also looking for a long-term deal. **GRADE: A**

SPECIAL TEAMS

It has been nearly a decade since the Cowboys had a full-time difference-maker on punt returns. It has been even longer since they had one on kick returns. That's all about to change.

Felix Jones was one of the NCAA's best kick returners over the last two years, and Pacman Jones has been an outstanding punt and kick returner in his brief career.

All of that indicates that Newman's days as a kick returner have ended. Given how explosive the Cowboys' offense has been the past two seasons, it would be even more dynamic if kick and punt returns improve its average field position by another five or 10 yards.

Punter Mat McBriar didn't make the Pro Bowl last year, but he remains among the league's best. He averaged 47.1 yards per punt and dropped 17 inside the 20-yard line. Placekicker Nick Folk was better than the Cowboys could have imagined in his rookie season, making 26 of 31 field goals and performing well under pressure. Dallas has such confidence in long snapper L.P. Ladouceur that they signed him to a five-year deal in the middle of last season. In two years with Dallas, he has never had an errant snap. **GRADE: A+**

BOTTOM LINE

This is one of the NFL's best teams, and it should be considered a serious contender to win the Super Bowl. The Cowboys have upgraded their roster and added playmakers. Now, it's just a matter of whether this group of players can move past their poor finishes of the last two years and get the breakthrough playoff win that can propel them to a championship. There's no reason it shouldn't happen. After all, those 13 Pro Bowl players are back.

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FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT

UP

ROSTER

#	QUARTERBACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
4	Bartel, Richard	QB	6-3	230	02/03/1983	0	Tarleton State
14	Johnson, Brad	QB	6-5	226	09/13/1968	14	Florida State
9	Romo, Tony	QB	6-2	225	04/21/1980	4	Eastern Illinois

#	OFFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
76	Adams, Flozell	T	6-7	340	05/18/1975	10	Michigan State
67	Berger, Joe	G	6-5	305	05/25/1982	2	Michigan Tech
75	Colombo, Marc	T	6-8	320	10/08/1978	5	Boston College
70	Davis, Leonard	G	6-6	366	09/05/1978	7	Texas
68	Free, Doug	T	6-6	324	01/06/1984	1	Northern Illinois
65	Gurode, Andre	C	6-4	312	03/06/1978	6	Colorado
63	Kosier, Kyle	G	6-5	305	11/27/1978	6	Arizona State
78	Marten, James	T	6-7	309	04/18/1984	0	Boston College
77	McQuistan, Pat	T	6-6	315	04/30/1983	2	Weber State
71	Procter, Cory	C	6-4	305	10/18/1982	1	Montana

#	RUNNING BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
34	Anderson, Deon	RB	5-10	243	01/27/1983	1	Connecticut
24	Barber, Marion	RB	6-0	220	06/10/1983	3	Minnesota
30	Coleman, Alonzo	RB	5-9	207	01/27/1984	0	Hampton
45	Cruz, Ronnie	RB	6-0	237	06/11/1981	2	Northern State

#	RECEIVERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
19	Austin, Miles	WR	6-3	215	06/30/1984	2	Monmouth
84	Crayton, Patrick	WR	6-0	205	04/07/1979	4	NW Oklahoma State
89	Curtis, Tony	TE	6-5	265	02/11/1983	2	Portland State
83	Glenn, Terry	WR	5-11	195	07/23/1974	12	Ohio State
44	Hannah, Rodney	TE	6-6	256	08/09/1984	0	Houston
17	Hurd, Sam	WR	6-2	195	04/24/1985	2	Northern Illinois
85	Jefferson, Mike	WR	6-1	215	12/28/1982	0	Montana State
81	Owens, Terrell	WR	6-3	224	12/07/1973	12	Chattanooga
86	Stanback, Isaiah	WR	6-2	213	08/16/1984	1	Washington
82	Witten, Jason	TE	6-5	265	05/06/1982	5	Tennessee

#	DEFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
92	Ayodele, Remi	DT	6-2	300	04/22/1983	1	Oklahoma
72	Bowen, Stephen	DE	6-5	300	03/28/1984	2	Hofstra
99	Canty, Chris	DE	6-7	300	11/10/1982	3	Virginia
97	Hatcher, Jason	DE	6-6	295	07/13/1982	2	Grambling State
66	Johnson, Tank	DT	6-3	300	12/07/1981	4	Washington
91	Ladouceur, L.P.	DE	6-4	255	03/13/1981	3	California
90	Ratliff, Jay	DE	6-4	298	08/29/1981	3	Auburn
64	Siavii, Junior	DT	6-5	330	11/14/1978	2	Oregon
60	Smith, Marcus	DE	6-4	281	02/07/1984	0	Arizona
96	Spears, Marcus	DE	6-4	298	03/08/1983	3	LSU

#	DEFENSIVE BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
20	Ball, Alan	CB	6-1	176	03/29/1985	1	Illinois
27	Brown, Courtney	S	6-1	200	02/10/1984	1	Cal Poly
36	Butler, Quincy	CB	6-1	190	11/25/1981	1	TCU
37	Everett, Tyler	CB	5-11	202	11/04/1983	1	Ohio State
26	Hamlin, Ken	S	6-2	209	01/20/1981	5	Arkansas
42	Henry, Anthony	CB	6-1	208	11/03/1976	7	South Florida
41	Newman, Terence	CB	5-11	195	09/04/1978	5	Kansas State
23	Oglesby, Evan	CB	5-10	185	12/18/1981	3	North Alabama
40	Phinisee, Justin	CB	5-11	199	04/10/1983	0	Oregon
25	Watkins, Pat	S	6-5	211	12/18/1982	2	Florida State
31	Williams, Roy	S	6-0	229	08/14/1980	6	Oklahoma
43	Wishom, Jerron	CB	6-0	197	03/01/1982	1	Louisiana Tech

#	LINEBACKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
57	Burnett, Kevin	LB	6-3	240	12/24/1982	3	Tennessee
54	Carpenter, Bobby	LB	6-2	257	08/01/1983	2	Ohio State
98	Ellis, Greg	LB	6-6	270	08/14/1975	10	North Carolina
56	James, Bradie	LB	6-2	250	01/17/1981	5	LSU
52	Long, Khari	LB	6-4	257	05/23/1982	1	Baylor
50	Rogers, Justin	LB	6-4	250	08/31/1983	1	Southern Methodist
48	Smith, Tyson	LB	6-2	240	10/09/1981	1	Iowa State
93	Spencer, Anthony	LB	6-3	266	01/23/1984	1	Purdue
55	Thomas, Zach	LB	5-11	228	09/01/1973	12	Texas Tech
94	Ware, DeMarcus	LB	6-4	257	07/31/1982	3	Troy

#	KICKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
6	Folk, Nick	K	6-1	225	11/05/1984	1	Arizona
1	McBriar, Mat	P	6-1	223	07/08/1979	4	Hawaii

▶ **WADE PHILLIPS,** *Head coach*

Jason Garrett, asst. head coach/off. coord.; **Brian Stewart**, def. coord.; **Ray Sherman**, wide receivers; **Todd Grantham**, def. line; **Bruce Read**, special teams; **John Garrett**, tight ends; **Dave Campo**, secondary; **Skip Peete**, running backs; **Reggie Herring**, linebackers; **Wade Wilson**, quarterbacks; **Hudson Houck**, off. line; **Brett Maxie**, secondary; **Dat Nguyen**; asst. linebackers/def. quality control

DETROIT LIONS

Marinelli has removed the deadwood, but Lions still appear to be a year away

By Tom Kowalski, *Booth Newspapers*

With at least six new starters on defense and a completely different offensive philosophy, the Lions continue to be a team in transition—for the eighth straight season.

Coach Rod Marinelli, in his third year on the job, still found it necessary to make sweeping changes in the offseason because he still hadn't rid the locker room of mediocre performers and negative influences.

Marinelli has been successful in tearing the team down completely and building a corps of disciplined players with the right attitudes. After changing coordinators in each of the last two years, Marinelli has also found a coaching staff that is in line with his philosophy and teaching techniques. Overall, the foundation has been set, but because it's all still relatively new on both sides of the ball, a legitimate playoff run is probably too much to expect.

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE

(an opponent breaks down the Lions)

"I like the changes they've made—not just with the players but with the coaching staff. (Former offensive coordinator Mike) Martz wasn't a good fit there. Most of that was on him, but part of it was the situation. Martz is all about stats and status, and winning comes after that, as crazy as that sounds.

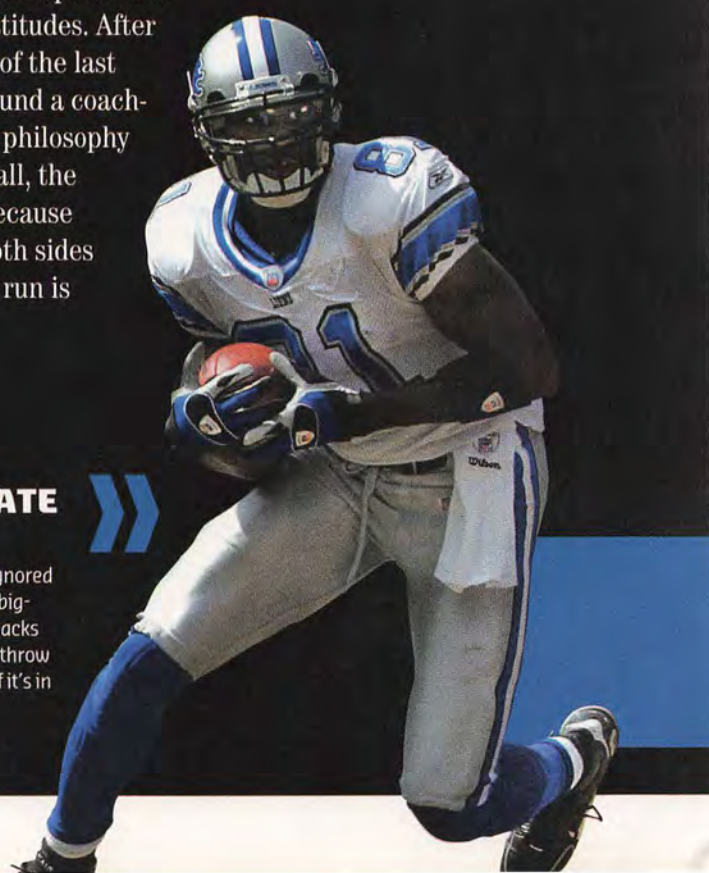
"(Jon) Kitna's a pretty good quarterback, he really is. His biggest problem has always been turning it over too much, regardless of the offense he's in. He's a solid leader. If he stays away from the bad plays, he'll be fine. They're cutting back the offense, which will make them better. More doesn't make you better.

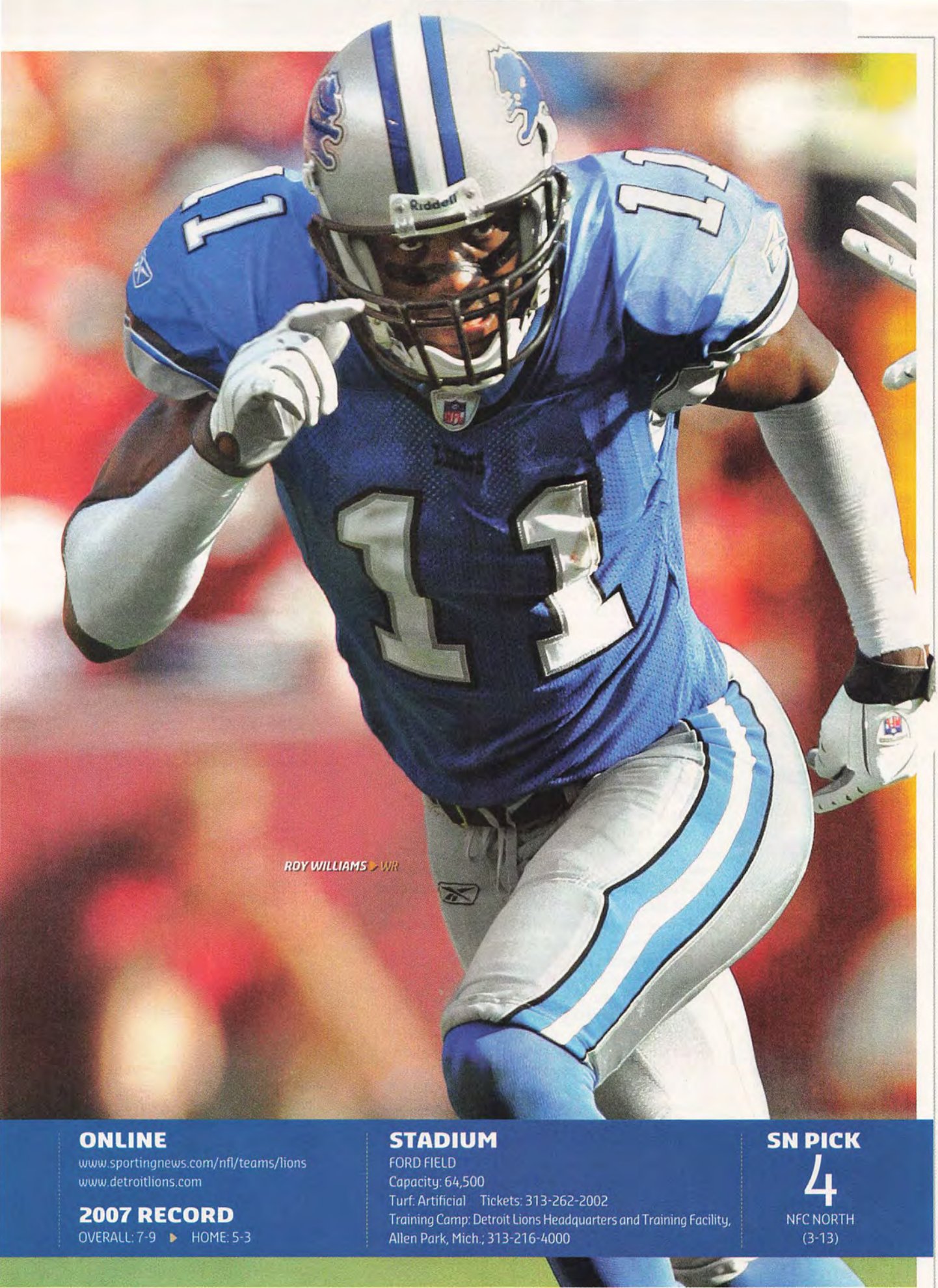
"Those two receivers (Roy Williams and Calvin Johnson) are really special, but they need a running back. Defensively, the linebacker situation is a joke—it's (Ernie) Sims and nobody. That's the biggest problem. With (head coach Rod) Marinelli and (president Matt) Millen both being defensive guys, you'd think that would've been fixed a long time ago. That just makes no sense to me. Overall, the talent on the roster isn't that bad, but they just don't know how to win. They're not very mentally tough. They beat themselves. ... "

BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

CALVIN JOHNSON ▸ WR

The second-year receiver was largely ignored in the offense last season, but should be a big-time target this year. The Detroit quarterbacks will have much more freedom this year to throw to Johnson if they like the matchup, even if it's in bracket coverage.





ONLINE

www.sportingnews.com/nfl/teams/lions
www.detroitlions.com

2007 RECORD

OVERALL: 7-9 ▶ HOME: 5-3

STADIUM

FORD FIELD
Capacity: 64,500
Turf: Artificial Tickets: 313-262-2002
Training Camp: Detroit Lions Headquarters and Training Facility, Allen Park, Mich.; 313-216-4000

SN PICK

4
NFC NORTH
(3-13)

(L TO R): JAY DROWNS / SN; BOB LEVERONE / SN

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 @ Atlanta — SEPT. 7 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 2 Green Bay — SEPT. 14 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 3 @ San Francisco — SEPT. 21 | 4:05 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 4 *OPEN DATE*

WEEK 5 Chicago — OCT. 5 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 6 @ Minnesota — OCT. 12 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 7 @ Houston — OCT. 19 | 4:05 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 8 Washington — OCT. 26 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 9 @ Chicago — NOV. 2 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 10 Jacksonville — NOV. 9 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 11 @ Carolina — NOV. 16 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 12 Tampa Bay — NOV. 23 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 13 Tennessee — NOV. 27 | 12:30 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 14 Minnesota — DEC. 7 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 15 @ Indianapolis — DEC. 14 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 16 New Orleans — DEC. 21 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 17 @ Green Bay — DEC. 28 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

THE BOOK ON ... CORY REDDING *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"I think he's solid playing inside; he was never a defensive end. He's got a great motor. Don't get me wrong—he's very talented, but that motor sets him apart. He's relentless. Redding doesn't have great footwork or great hands, which is why he's better inside. He locates the ball very well and he uses his leverage to beat the guards. He's extremely strong. ...

"The most interesting thing is that he's a better player when Shaun Rogers isn't around—look at the tape. Now that Rogers is gone, Redding will be even better. Redding is a leader and you can see he really wants to win. I never got that feeling with Rogers. ...

"Redding didn't have many sacks last year, but he's actually a good closer. He can close the deal. He's a beast and he's going to have a good year. When he's on his game, man, he's tough to block."

OFFENSE

Former offensive line coach Jim Colletto replaces the departed Mike Martz as coordinator, and the changes will be drastic. Colletto will keep Martz's three-digit passing attack and all the terminology, but he'll cut the playbook to a fraction of its original size. Colletto will stress two big changes in philosophy: he'll put more emphasis on the running game and, when throwing the ball, he's going to make sure it gets into the hands of gifted receivers Roy Williams and Calvin Johnson.

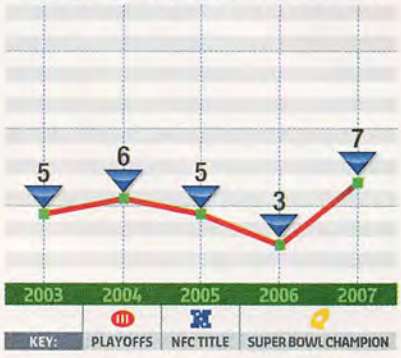
Quarterbacks Jon Kitna goes into camp as the unquestioned starter, and it'll be almost impossible for backups Drew Stanton and Dan Orlovsky to beat him out based on preseason production. However, there's a different dynamic going on here this season. Last year, Martz wasn't a big fan of either Stanton or Orlovsky and neither player got much of a chance to show his stuff. Stanton suffered a relatively minor knee injury in camp and was shelved for the season instead of getting the chance to come back after six weeks. Stanton, last year's second-round pick, and Orlovsky are going to get much more preseason playing time this year, and the organization will have to make a decision about whether it's finally time to make the commitment to a younger player. (Kitna turns 36 in September.)

If Kitna plays well early and the team has some success, then he'll stay entrenched as the starter. But if Kitna doesn't play well and the Lions struggle out of the gate, Marinelli will be under pressure, from both outside and inside the organization, to consider making a move. **GRADE: C-**

Running backs Rookie third-round pick Kevin Smith, supported by an improved offensive line and a commitment to the run from the coaching staff, will get every opportunity to follow in Adrian Peterson's footsteps and vie for Rookie-of-the-Year honors. Smith might not have Peterson's explosiveness, but he has excellent speed and can also run with some power. He should fit easily into Detroit's system after running behind basically the same zone-blocking scheme in college.

Veteran Tatum Bell was re-signed to provide some insurance, but Bell may have trouble staying active for games because he doesn't provide anything on special teams. Aveion Cason, a strong special-teams player, will be fighting for a spot against Brian Calhoun, a former third-round pick with good speed who hasn't stayed healthy enough to show how much he can contribute.

5-YEAR WINS TREND



NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	322.9	19
RUSHING	80.5	31
PASSING	242.4	9
SCORING	346	16
PUNT RETURNS	8.2	22
KICK RETURNS	22.6	17
RED ZONE TD %	50.0	18t
TOTAL DEFENSE	377.6	32
AGAINST RUSH	119.4	23
AGAINST PASS	258.2	31
POINTS ALLOWED	444	32
INTERCEPTIONS	17	14t
SACKS	37	9t
TURNOVER DIFF.	-1	17t

At fullback, Jon Bradley returns but will be asked to adjust his game. He was a brawling 300-pounder last year, but now the Lions want him to drop some weight because the scheme is changing a bit and they don't need as much bulk at that spot. Sean McHugh will have the edge over rookie fifth-round pick Jerome Felton for the backup job because of his experience. **GRADE: C+**

Receivers Johnson, last year's second overall pick, put up decent

JAY DROWNS / SN

numbers but wasn't the playmaker he was expected to be because of a lower-back bruise he suffered in the third game of the season. Johnson is expected to bounce back in a big way and, with the proven Williams on the opposite side, defenses are going to be forced into a lot of two-deep coverages. While the Lions aren't going to be the pass-happy team they were under Martz, the coaching staff will put much more of a focus on getting the ball into the hands of the outside receivers.

The backups, Shaun McDonald and Mike Furrey, made their mark in Martz's system and are quality, reliable players. McDonald is more quick than fast, but he's extremely slippery and has a knack of making the first guy miss to pick up crucial first-down yardage. Like McDonald, Furrey knows all four receiving positions and can fill in anywhere, which means Detroit won't be crippled if they lose Johnson or Williams to a short-term injury.

The free-agent acquisition of tight end Michael Gaines gives the Lions some bulk in the running game. Gaines is also a decent receiver, but he won't stretch the field. If Dan Campbell returns healthy from a lingering elbow problem, the Lions will have some real punch with their two-tight end package. With Detroit's talented receivers on the outside, the tight ends should get a lot of room to work in the middle. **GRADE: B+**

Offensive line » Detroit franchised left tackle Jeff Backus two years ago, but he has yet to play like an elite player. The Lions believe Backus' problems were related mostly to all of the seven-step drops the offense used under Martz. Now that that's a thing of the past, Backus' level of play should rise. Backus is a decent athlete whose strength is in the confidence he has in his technique. That was clearly missing last season.

Edwin Mulitalo is a mauler at left guard, while center Dominic Raiola doesn't have ideal size but moves very well and can block well in space. There will be a battle at right guard between Stephen Peterman and Frank Davis, an inexperienced young player. They're both better run blockers than pass protectors.

At right tackle, the job will go to rookie first-round pick Gosder Cherilus, a powerful blocker out of Boston College who approaches his job with a nasty demeanor. Depth is going to be a problem because tackle Jonathan Scott, who has some talent, can't stay healthy and guard/tackle Corey Hulsey was out of football last year. George Foster will be decent in spot play, but his concentration wanes when he's forced to play for long periods of time. **GRADE: C-**

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		
QB	Jon Kitna	Drew Stanton
FB	Jon Bradley	Sean McHugh
RB	Kevin Smith	Tatum Bell
WR	Calvin Johnson	Mike Furrey
WR	Roy Williams	Shaun McDonald
TE	Michael Gaines	Dan Campbell
LT	Jeff Backus	Jonathan Scott
LG	Edwin Mulitalo	Manny Ramirez
C	Dominic Raiola	Edwin Mulitalo
RG	Stephen Peterman	Frank Davis
RT	Gosder Cherilus	George Foster
DEFENSE		
LE	Jared DeVries	Ikaika Alama-Francis
NT	Chuck Darby	Langston Moore
UT	Cory Redding	Shaun Cody
RE	Dewayne White	Claude Harriott
SLB	Paris Lenon	Alex Lewis
MLB	Jordon Dizon	Buster Davis
WLB	Ernie Sims	Anthony Cannon
LCB	Brian Kelly	Travis Fisher
SS	Daniel Bullocks	Kalvin Pearson
FS	Dwight Smith	Gerald Alexander
RCB	Leigh Bodden	Stanley Wilson
SPECIALISTS		
K	Jason Hanson	
P	Nick Harris	
KR	Aveion Cason	
PR	Kenneth Moore	
LS	Don Muhlbach	

GREGORY SHAMUS / GETTY IMAGES

LIONS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1 Joe Schmidt *(1953-65)*

The 10-time Pro Bowler captained the Lions' defense for almost a decade and was named head coach a year after he retired.

2 Wayne Walker *(1958-72)*

A fixture at linebacker for more than a decade, Walker also scored 331 points as the team's placekicker.

3 Chris Spielman *(1988-95)*

Entered the pros with a lot of hype after winning the Lombardi Award at Ohio State, then led the Lions in tackles during each of his seasons with the club.

» DRAFT REPORT GRADE ▸ B

The Lions did a good job of solidifying their offensive line by grabbing Boston College's **Gosder Cherilus**, who should step in and start at right tackle immediately. Cherilus has solid athleticism, very long arms and is a competitive blocker. In the second round, the Lions hit a home run with LB **Jordon Dizon**, who plays with tremendous energy and passion on every snap. He reminds some of current Lions LB Ernie Sims and has the athleticism, smarts and versatility to start at almost any defensive position. After cutting Kevin Jones, Detroit grabbed a power back in **Kevin Smith**, who will bring a different mentality to the running game. Smith isn't the elusive or explosive runner that Jones was, but he can break tackles and gain yards after contact. In the third round, the Lions drafted two very athletic defensive linemen in **Andre Fluellen** and **Cliff Avril**. Fluellen should contribute early by rushing the passer and blowing up running plays in the backfield, while Avril needs some technique work to reach his potential. Receiver **Kenneth Moore** knows how to get open, has very good hands and can also line up in the backfield if needed, which should enable him to make the Lions as a backup wideout and return man. Jerome Felton is a raw but very athletic fullback who has the chance to develop, but right now is much more productive with the ball in his hands than as a blocker. Defensive tackle **Landon Cohen** and S **Caleb Campbell** are two late round prospects who will need to become better technically if they are going to stick around and make contributions in the NFL.

» 2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
1	17	Cherilus, Gosder	T	6-7	318	Boston College
2	14	Dizon, Jordon	LB	6-0	225	Colorado
3	1	Smith, Kevin	RB	6-1	211	UCF
3	24	Fluellen, Andre	DT	6-5	280	Florida State
3	29	Avril, Cliff	LB	6-3	251	Purdue
5	1	Moore, Kenneth	WR	6-0	204	Wake Forest
5	11	Felton, Jerome	RB	6-0	247	Furman
7	9	Cohen, Landon	DT	6-3	272	Ohio
7	11	Campbell, Caleb	S	6-2	224	Army

CHERILUS ▸ OT

ROSTER

#	QUARTERBACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
8	Kitna, Jon	QB	6-2	220	09/21/1972	11	Central Washington
6	Orlovsky, Dan	QB	6-5	230	08/18/1983	1	Connecticut
5	Stanton, Drew	QB	6-3	230	05/07/1984	0	Michigan State

#	OFFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
76	Backus, Jeff	T	6-5	305	09/21/1977	7	Michigan
61	Davis, Frank	G	6-4	326	08/22/1981	1	South Florida
74	Dunn, Jon	T	6-7	324	12/12/1981	0	Virginia Tech
72	Foster, George	T	6-5	338	06/09/1980	5	Georgia
71	Hulsey, Corey	G	6-4	325	07/26/1977	5	Clemson
48	Muhlbach, Don	C	6-4	265	08/17/1981	4	Texas A&M
64	Mulitalo, Edwin	G	6-3	350	09/01/1974	9	Arizona
66	Peterman, Stephen	G	6-4	323	01/11/1982	3	LSU
51	Raiola, Dominic	C	6-1	295	12/30/1978	7	Nebraska
63	Ramirez, Manny	G	6-3	335	02/19/1983	1	Texas Tech
73	Scott, Jonathan	T	6-6	318	01/10/1983	2	Texas

#	RUNNING BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
28	Bell, Tatum	RB	5-11	213	03/02/1981	4	Oklahoma State
40	Bradley, Jon	RB	6-1	310	01/13/1981	4	Arkansas State
29	Calhoun, Brian	RB	5-10	208	05/08/1984	2	Wisconsin
36	Cason, Aveion	RB	5-10	204	07/12/1979	7	Illinois State
44	Pinner, Artose	RB	5-10	235	01/05/1978	6	Kentucky
39	Ricard, Alan	RB	5-11	237	01/17/1977	5	Louisiana-Monroe

#	RECEIVERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
12	Ball, Reggie	WR	5-11	195	10/06/1984	0	Georgia Tech
19	Bellamy, Ron	WR	6-0	205	12/28/1981	1	Michigan
89	Campbell, Dan	TE	6-5	262	04/13/1976	9	Texas A&M
80	Ellis, Devale	WR	5-11	170	04/02/1984	1	Hofstra
82	FitzSimmons, Casey	TE	6-4	258	10/10/1980	5	Carroll (MT)
87	Furrey, Mike	WR	6-0	195	05/12/1977	5	Northern Iowa
86	Gaines, Michael	TE	6-3	277	03/30/1980	4	UCF
85	Harris, Clark	TE	6-5	256	07/10/1984	0	Rutgers
81	Johnson, Calvin	WR	6-5	235	09/25/1985	1	Georgia Tech
84	McDonald, Shaun	WR	5-10	183	06/13/1981	5	Arizona State
49	McHugh, Sean	TE	6-5	265	05/27/1982	4	Penn State
10	Middleton, Brandon	WR	5-10	190	01/02/1981	1	Houston
83	Owens, John	TE	6-3	270	01/10/1980	5	Notre Dame
16	Standeford, John	WR	6-4	206	04/15/1982	0	Purdue
11	Williams, Roy	WR	6-2	220	12/20/1981	4	Texas

#	DEFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
97	Alama-Francis, Ikaika	DE	6-5	280	12/04/1984	1	Hawaii
75	Cody, Shaun	DT	6-4	310	01/22/1983	3	USC
91	Darby, Chuck	DT	6-0	297	10/22/1975	7	South Carolina State
70	DeGrate, Victor	DE	6-3	250	02/08/1985	0	Oklahoma State
95	DeVries, Jared	DE	6-4	275	06/11/1976	9	Iowa
70	Harriott, Claude	DE	6-3	271	04/08/1981	0	Pittsburgh
79	Moore, Langston	DT	6-1	305	07/17/1981	4	South Carolina
78	Redding, Cory	DT	6-4	295	11/15/1980	5	Texas
93	Smith, Corey	DE	6-2	250	10/02/1979	6	North Carolina State
99	White, Dewayne	DE	6-2	273	10/19/1979	5	Louisville

#	DEFENSIVE BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
42	Alexander, Gerald	S	6-0	204	06/28/1984	1	Boise State
24	Blue, Greg	S	6-2	216	03/12/1982	2	Georgia
30	Bodden, Leigh	CB	6-1	192	09/24/1981	5	Duquesne
27	Bullocks, Daniel	S	6-0	213	02/28/1983	1	Nebraska
33	Edwards, Dovonte	CB	6-0	182	10/17/1982	2	North Carolina State
21	Fisher, Travis	CB	5-10	189	09/12/1979	6	UCF
35	Hicks, LaMarcus	CB	6-0	189	04/15/1983	1	Iowa State
25	Kelly, Brian	CB	5-11	193	01/14/1976	10	USC
32	Pearson, Kalvin	S	5-10	200	10/22/1978	4	Grambling State
38	Robinson, Ramzee	CB	5-10	186	02/20/1984	1	Alabama
39	Route, Israel	CB	5-9	194	12/02/1984	0	Tulane
26	Smith, Dwight	S	5-10	201	08/13/1978	7	Akron
23	Smith, Keith	CB	5-11	192	03/20/1980	4	McNeese State
31	Wilson, Stanley	CB	5-11	189	11/05/1982	3	Stanford

#	LINEBACKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
52	Cannon, Anthony	LB	6-0	226	12/31/1984	2	Tulane
55	Davis, Buster	LB	5-9	239	10/20/1983	1	Florida State
58	Fincher, Alfred	LB	6-1	238	08/15/1983	3	Connecticut
54	Gardner, Gilbert	LB	6-1	228	05/09/1982	4	Purdue
53	Lenon, Paris	LB	6-2	235	11/26/1977	6	Richmond
59	Lewis, Alex	LB	6-0	227	06/11/1981	4	Wisconsin
50	Sims, Ernie	LB	6-0	225	12/23/1984	2	Florida State

#	KICKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
3	Ernster, Paul	K	6-0	217	01/26/1982	3	Northern Arizona
4	Hanson, Jason	K	6-0	190	06/17/1970	16	Washington State
2	Harris, Nick	P	6-2	218	07/23/1978	7	California

▶ **ROD MARINELLI,** *Head coach*

Jim Colletto, off. coord.; **Joe Barry**, def. coord.; **Kippy Brown**, asst. head coach/passing game coord.; **Mike Barry**, asst. off. line; **Pat Carter**, tight ends; **Sam Gash**, running backs; **Shawn Jefferson**, wide receivers; **Scot Loeffler**, quarterbacks; **Joe Cullen**, def. line; **Jimmy Lake**, secondary; **Clayton Lopez**, asst. secondary; **Phil Snow**, linebackers; **Stan Kwan**, special teams

DEFENSE

This is the third season of the Tampa 2 scheme in Detroit (the second under coordinator Joe Barry), and the Lions are coming off a season in which they were the worst in the league (in yards and points allowed). The problem in the past hasn't been the system, but the ineffective players running it; that's why more than half the starters will be new. Several of those players, including tackle Chuck Darby, cornerback Brian Kelly and safety Dwight Smith, played the defense under Marinelli in Tampa Bay.

Defensive line » One of the keys to this unit will be the development of second-year left end Ikaika Alama-Francis. Marinelli, a defensive-line specialist, couldn't get anything done with two players he inherited (Shaun Rogers and Kalimba Edwards), but now he's working with one he drafted (and the Lions traded up to get him). Alama-Francis is all raw speed and power and lacks the finer points of a pass-rushing end: getting off the ball, a first step, hand placement and counter moves. How quickly he learns those things could determine how successful this group will be.

Dewayne White, who is being switched over to the right side, is Detroit's best rusher but is coming off of a year in which he was limited by a painful elbow injury. On the left side, veteran Jared DeVries will share time with Alama-Francis, while rookie third-round pick Cliff Avril will get some opportunities as a pass-rush specialist on third down.

The Lions need tackle Cory Redding, who was franchised last season, to bounce back from a subpar year in which he had just one sack. Redding can be a disruptive force inside and, with Rogers gone, the Lions will be counting on that. Darby, who was signed as a

OFFSEASON MOVES

ADDITIONS:

FS **Dwight Smith** *(FA/Vikings)*, DB **Leigh Bodden** *(trade/Browns)*, TE **Michael Gaines** *(FA/Bills)*, DT **Chartric Darby** *(FA/Seahawks)*, CB **Brian Kelly** *(FA/Buccaneers)*, S **Kalvin Pearson** *(FA/Buccaneers)*, LB **Gilbert Gardner** *(FA/Titans)*, LB **Alfred Fincher** *(FA/Saints)*

SUBTRACTIONS:

DB **Fernando Bryant** *(FA/Patriots)*, OT **Barry Stokes** *(FA)*, C **Damien Woody** *(FA/Jets)*, WR **Troy Walters** *(FA)*, S **Idrees Bashir** *(FA)*, RB **T.J. Duckett** *(FA/Seahawks)*, LB **Teddy Lehman** *(FA/Buccaneers)*, LB **Boss Bailey** *(FA/Broncos)*, G **Blaine Saipia** *(FA)*, DE **Kalimba Edwards** *(FA/Raiders)*, RB **Kevin Jones** *(FA)*, SS **Kenoy Kennedy** *(FA)*

INSIDE THE HEADSET

ROD MARINELLI

Marinelli will take a flier here and there, but he's a defensive coach in every fiber of his being. His instinctive approach is to play it safe and rely on the defense. With coordinator Mike Martz now gone, there will be fewer suggestions from the offense to go with a more aggressive philosophy.

ERNIE SIMS ▶ *LB*

(L TO R): DAVID DUROCHIK FOR SN; HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL

FANTASY SPIN

http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football

WILLIAMS

KITNA

BODDEN

With coordinator Mike Martz gone, Detroit will put more emphasis on the run. Unfortunately, that still doesn't make inconsistent Tatum Bell more than a No. 3 running back.

$ BUY »» Roy Williams, WR

SELL »» Jon Kitna, QB

Z SLEEPER »» Leigh Bodden, DB

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/09	W	36-21	at Oakland Raiders
09/16	W	20-17	Minnesota Vikings
09/23	L	21-56	at Philadelphia Eagles
09/30	W	37-27	Chicago Bears
10/07	L	3-34	at Washington Redskins
10/21	W	23-16	Tampa Bay Buccaneers
10/28	W	16-7	at Chicago Bears
11/04	W	44-7	Denver Broncos
11/11	L	21-31	at Arizona Cardinals
11/18	L	10-16	New York Giants
11/22	L	26-37	Green Bay Packers
12/02	L	10-42	at Minnesota Vikings
12/09	L	27-28	Dallas Cowboys
12/16	L	14-51	at San Diego Chargers
12/23	W	25-20	Kansas City Chiefs
12/30	L	13-34	at Green Bay Packers

WON 7, LOST 9

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Jones	153	581	3.8	34	8
Duckett	65	335	5.2	53	3
Bell	44	182	4.1	24	1
Kitna	25	63	2.5	11	0
Johnson	4	52	13.0	32t	1
Cason	11	38	3.5	12	0
Calhoun	7	35	5.0	17	0
Bradley	5	9	1.8	3	0
McDonald	4	2	0.5	9	0
Williams	2	1	0.5	9	0
O'Sullivan	4	-10	-2.5	2	0
LIONS	324	1288	4.0	53	13
OPPONENTS	448	1911	4.3	49	19

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
McDonald	79	943	11.9	49t	6
Williams	64	838	13.1	91t	5
Furrey	61	664	10.9	49	1
Johnson	48	756	15.8	49	4
Jones	32	197	6.2	16	0
McHugh	17	252	14.8	46	0
Bell	14	63	4.5	15	0
Cason	14	129	9.2	20	0
Walters	9	101	11.2	21	1
FitzSimmons	8	85	10.6	22	1
Middleton	8	70	8.8	17	1
Calhoun	5	35	7.0	11	0
Duckett	4	54	13.5	22	0
Bradley	2	10	5.0	8	0
Campbell	1	1	1.0	1	0
Kitna	1	9	9.0	9	0
Owens	1	9	9.0	9	0
LIONS	368	4216	11.5	91t	19
OPPONENTS	422	4387	10.4	68t	32

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Kitna	561	355	4068	18	20
O'Sullivan	26	13	148	1	2
LIONS	587	368	4216	19	22
OPPONENTS	602	422	4387	32	17

SACKS LIONS 37, OPPONENTS 54

Rogers 7, DeVries 6.5, White 6.5, Bailey 3.5, Edwards 3, Smith 2.5, Alexander 2, Lenon 2, Moore 2, Redding 1, Sims 1

HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL

free agent to play the nose, will be solid against the run, but the Lions won't get much pass pressure from him. Backup tackle Langston Moore is capable of making a big play. Shaun Cody has yet to fulfill his potential. **GRADE: C-**

Linebackers »» It took a couple of years, but Marinelli finally got the kind of linebackers he needs to make the Tampa 2 successful with the Lions. Detroit picked up Ernie Sims in the first round two years ago to play the weak side, and he's been as good as expected. Now the Lions are anticipating the same production from rookie second-round pick Jordon Dizon of Colorado. A little undersized for a middle linebacker, Dizon makes up for it with good quickness in traffic and excellent instincts. Like Sims, he reads plays quickly and moves swiftly to get into position before blockers can reach him. Those are two more important positions of this unit and, if Dizon pans out, the defense shouldn't stumble like it did in previous years.

Paris Lenon, the former starter in the middle, takes over on the strong side and he's a smart player with a great feel for floating in zone coverages. Alex Lewis, another good zone player, will be the backup there, while Buster Davis and Alfred Fincher will vie for a reserve role in the middle. Anthony Cannon, who is strong on special teams, should win the backup job on the weak side behind Sims. **GRADE:B-**

Secondary »» After trading away cornerback Dre Bly last year, the Lions lost all of their playmaking ability in the secondary. Now they hope they've got it back after dealing for Cleveland's Leigh Bodden and signing free agent Kelly. Bodden, an underrated player, is just now entering the prime of his career. Travis Fisher re-signed as a free agent and is strong at the nickel-back position because he's good in short zones and can support the run with force. Backup Keith Smith is one of Detroit's best on-ball defenders but needs to improve his ability to jam receivers and step up in run support.

The Lions are loaded at safety, so it will be interesting to see how the starting battle shakes out. Veteran free agent Dwight Smith is likely to win one spot because of his Tampa 2 experience. Second-year player Gerald Alexander and Daniel Bullocks, who missed all of last season with a knee injury, will fight for the other spot. Both Alexander and Bullocks are raw, and the winner will be determined by who picks up the defense the quickest. Kalvin Pearson, another former Tampa 2 guy, provides more depth and is a special-teams demon. **GRADE: C+**

SPECIAL TEAMS

At 38, kicker Jason Hanson isn't showing any significant signs of age, but he uncharacteristically missed a couple of big field goals last year. He still has plenty of leg for long field goals and can bomb kickoffs when needed. Punter Nick Harris has turned into a weapon and is very good at angling punts and also dropping pooch kicks in the middle of the field. Long snapper Don Muhlbach is steady and reliable and will not be challenged for the job.

After some disastrous play in kick coverage last season—and mediocre results in kick returns—Marinelli has focused on these units and added some speed and playmaking ability in the offseason. There are still concerns about the return game, though, where the Lions don't have any explosive pop. Versatile fifth-round rookie Kenneth Moore, who played running back and wide receiver at Wake Forest, may return punts, but he doesn't have game-breaking speed. **GRADE: C-**

BOTTOM LINE

Lost in the team's 6-2 start and ultimate 7-9 finish last season was the fact that the Lions got blown out in four of their losses. How bad was it? The Chargers and Vikings both scored on each of their first-half possessions, while the Eagles scored six first-half touchdowns. The Lions had success early because they were getting a slew of turnovers (they led the league for most of the first half of the season), but they were terrible on third down and couldn't keep their defense off the field. With changes throughout the roster, especially defensively, the Lions are going to be better. They've got so far to go, however, that reaching the .500 mark would have to be deemed a successful season.

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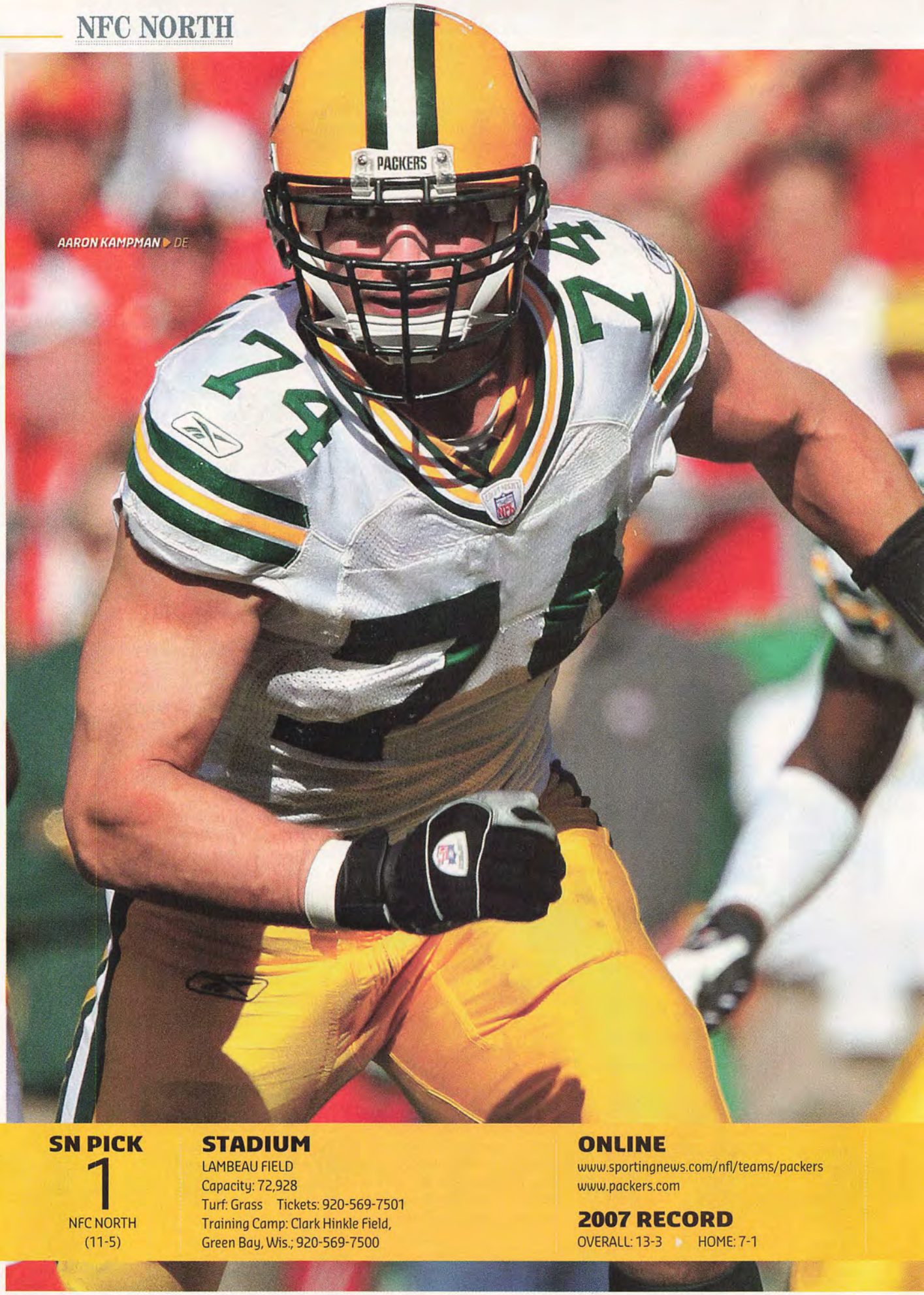
FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT

STEADY



AARON KAMPMAN ▶ DE

SN PICK

1

NFC NORTH
(11-5)

STADIUM

LAMBEAU FIELD
Capacity: 72,928
Turf: Grass Tickets: 920-569-7501
Training Camp: Clark Hinkle Field,
Green Bay, Wis.; 920-569-7500

ONLINE

www.sportingnews.com/nfl/teams/packers
www.packers.com

2007 RECORD

OVERALL: 13-3 ▶ HOME: 7-1

(L TO R): ALBERT DICKSON / SN (2); HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL

GREEN BAY PACKERS

Rodgers' readiness is key to getting Pack back to title game

By Tom Silverstein, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

Aaron Rodgers wasn't even a gleam in the organization's eye the last time someone other than Brett Favre lined up as starting quarterback for the Green Bay Packers.

General manager Ted Thompson ranks as one of the best scouting minds in the NFL, but not even he could have picked out Rodgers from a group of third-graders playing pickup football during recess in Chico, Calif.

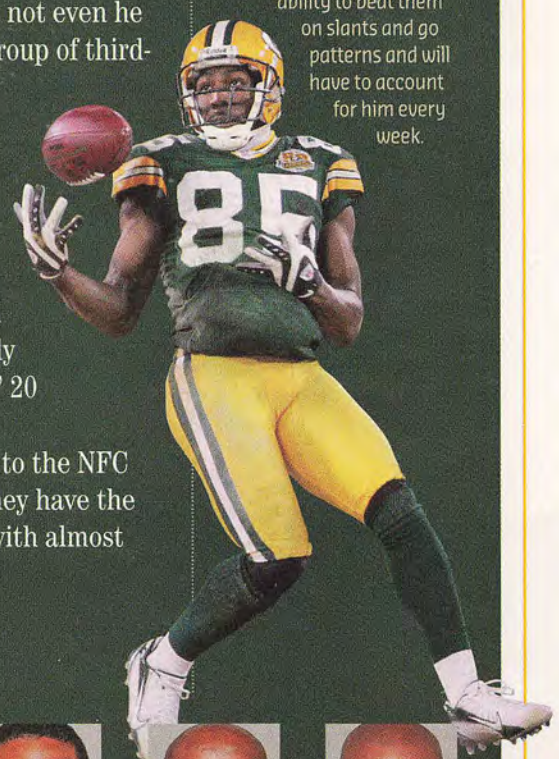
After 275 consecutive games with Favre under center, the ball transfers hands to the 24-year-old Rodgers, and he better not lose the grip. Not if the Packers want to build on an 18-4 record over their last 22 games, a pace that only slightly trails the New England Patriots' 20 victories in the same span.

The Packers showed during their run to the NFC Championship Game last season that they have the defense and passing game to compete with almost

BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

GREG JENNINGS ▸ WR

Jennings is on the verge of becoming a star. After averaging 17.4 yards per reception and catching 12 touchdowns last season, he's ready to take over the role as go-to receiver. Teams are going to fear his ability to beat them on slants and go patterns and will have to account for him every week.



FANTASY SPIN

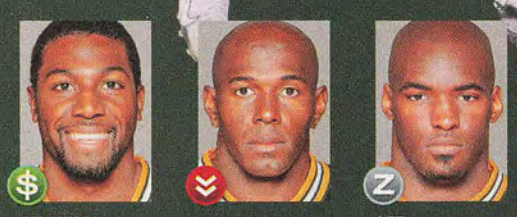
http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football

The Packers have plenty of faith in quarterback Aaron Rodgers, but fantasy owners simply haven't seen enough of him. As a result, draft Rodgers as a No. 2 starter.

$ BUY »» Greg Jennings, WR

SELL »» Donald Driver, WR

Z SLEEPER »» Donald Lee, TE



JENNINGS DRIVER LEE

anyone, plus a running game that began to show life with the emergence of Ryan Grant.

Still, Favre was the foreman and little got done without his input. Rodgers will not be asked to carry the same load Favre did, but he will have to be efficient, consistent and, most of all, healthy for the Packers to have a shot at winning a championship.

OFFENSE

Even before Rodgers took over, coach Mike McCarthy tried to establish a power running game. He had a little bit of success last year with Grant, but his offensive line couldn't get it done consistently and he had to go to the air.

This year, he absolutely has to have a running game. Rodgers can't be expected to throw as often and as successfully as Favre, especially with opposing defenses daring him to run the ball. Favre was outstanding at making audibles into better plays based on the look he got from defenses and could make the switch seconds before the snap.

It's unreasonable to think Rodgers will be able to do the same in his first year as a starter, so McCarthy has to take the pressure off of him with a successful running game. When he does pass, Rodgers will go deep more often than Favre because he throws a very good fade and can attack the perimeter of a defense.

Rodgers has a very talented receiving crew bolstered by the selection of Kansas State's Jordy Nelson, the team's top pick in the 2008 draft.

Quarterbacks Utilizing mostly three- and four-receiver sets, Favre orchestrated the No. 2 passing attack in the game last year while posting a passer rating of 95.7, the third best of his career. Rodgers has had the benefit of watching Favre for three seasons, and after two years of not showing much promise, he broke out in a relief appearance against Dallas last season. Replacing an injured Favre, Rodgers completed 18 of 26 passes for 201 yards and a touchdown in a little more than a half of play. Having devoted the past two offseasons to building up his 6-2, 223-pound frame and lowering his body fat, Rodgers throws with more zip than when he arrived as a first-round pick in 2005. More than likely, second-round pick Brian Brohm will be Rodgers' backup. McCarthy considered

DRAFT REPORT GRADE ▸ B

Green Bay surprised many by grabbing WR **Jordy Nelson** with its first pick. He is a physical receiver who consistently makes big plays running with the ball. Nelson was also a solid return man in college and should be able to instantly help in that area with the Packers. The team then selected QB **Brian Brohm**, who looks to have all the tools to be a very good NFL starter. While Aaron Rodgers is going to get the first crack at replacing Brett Favre, Brohm could end up being the long-term solution. And while there's no doubt that Charles Woodson and Al Harris are both top cornerbacks, the two are also aging, so grabbing **Patrick Lee** at the end of the second round makes a lot of sense. Lee is a tough and physical corner whose style of play fits Green Bay's defensive scheme perfectly. Tight end **Jermichael Finley** has the hands and receiving skills to replace the departed Bubba Franks in time. Defensive end **Jeremy Thompson** is a solid athlete but needs to improve his technique in order to be more than a backup in the NFL. **Josh Sitton** played right tackle in college, however, he's ideally suited to play guard and should challenge for a starting job there in a couple of years. Offensive tackle **Breno Giacomini** has the intelligence that will give him a chance to be a solid backup in the NFL, a role that **Matt Flynn** will also serve as the team's No. 3 QB. **Brett Swain** is a raw, but athletic, receiver who will need to greatly improve his routes and consistency to stick in the pros.

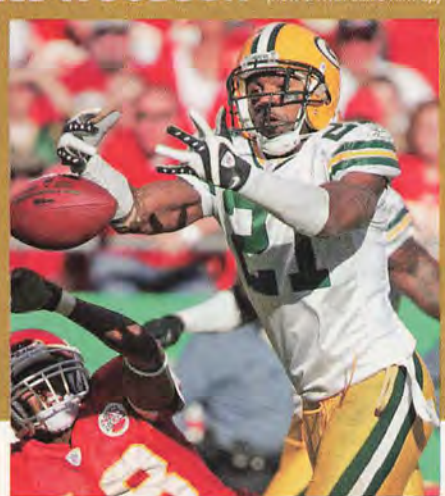
2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
2	5	Nelson, Jordy	WR	6-3	217	Kansas State
2	25	Brohm, Brian	QB	6-4	228	Louisville
2	29	Lee, Patrick	CB	6-0	201	Auburn
3	28	Finley, Jermichael	TE	6-5	240	Texas
4	3	Thompson, Jeremy	DE	6-5	264	Wake Forest
4	36	Sitton, Josh	G	6-3	319	UCF
5	15	Giacomini, Breno	T	6-7	300	Louisville
7	2	Flynn, Matt	QB	6-3	227	LSU
7	10	Swain, Brett	WR	6-1	200	San Diego State

5-YEAR WINS TREND

THE BOOK ON ... CHARLES WOODSON *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"I think he still has athletic ability and size and strength. He's an aware player. He's got good feet and good balance. The biggest thing I thought he struggled with was run support. He wasn't very physical. He was very inconsistent. Sometimes he wants to tackle, sometimes he doesn't. He guesses in coverage at times. That's how he's made his living. He's better man-to-man. When he's in zone, he'll draft, and that's when he guesses a lot. I don't think he's dropped off a lot. He's got some burst still. He has the ability to mirror. He's better in the short area than Al Harris. He still has good feet and athletic ability."



NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	370.7	2
RUSHING	99.8	21
PASSING	270.9	2
SCORING	435	4
PUNT RETURNS	10.3	7
KICK RETURNS	21.8	23
RED ZONE TD %	54.0	14
TOTAL DEFENSE	313.3	11
AGAINST RUSH	102.9	14
AGAINST PASS	210.4	12
POINTS ALLOWED	291	6t
INTERCEPTIONS	19	6t
SACKS	36	13t
TURNOVER DIFF.	+4	10t

TOP TO BOTTOM: BEN LIEBENBERG / GETTY IMAGES; JULIE SCHEIDEGGER / US PRESSWIRE

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE *(an opponent breaks down the Packers)*

"The big thing is the quarterback. (Brett) Favre played pretty damn well last year. I liked what I saw in the preseason and the Dallas game (from Aaron Rodgers), but beyond that I can't say a lot. What really surprised me was that they didn't address guard. (Daryn) Colledge really fell off, but I like (Junius) Coston. ... The biggest thing for them last year was that they didn't get hit with injuries. That seems to be a determining factor in getting to the championship game. I thought they might do something with running back. (Ryan) Grant just seems like a solid, steady guy. He runs hard, he has good vision. Beyond that, I don't know. On defense, I think they're going to miss Corey Williams (at tackle). I really like Johnny Jolly. The young kid, (Justin) Harrell, has to come around."

signing a veteran and still may do so, but Brohm was perhaps the most ready-made quarterback in the draft and will have no problem learning the system. **GRADE: C-**

Running backs » Last year, Grant came out of nowhere to become one of the most dynamic rushers in the NFL.

The 6-1, 218-pound Grant had more 20-yard rushes per carry than LaDainian Tomlinson, Willie Parker, Adrian Peterson and Brian Westbrook, and his 5.1-yard average ranked third among backs with 150 or more carries. The Packers couldn't find many backs who are a better fit for their one-cut style of run offense. Still, Grant hasn't shown that he can carry the load for an entire season, and he has to get better as a blocker and receiver. He had 30 catches last season, but averaged just 4.8 yards per reception.

The coaches are expecting a breakout campaign from 2007 second-round pick Brandon Jackson, who started the first three games last season but then got hurt and couldn't win back his job. At fullback, converted linebacker Korey Hall was adequate, but he'll get some competition from Ryan Powdrell, a bigger, more powerful blocker. **GRADE: B-**

Receivers » This was Donald Driver's group under Favre, but with the changeover to Rodgers, expect Greg Jennings to become the go-to guy.

Jennings really started to take off last year and became the big-play threat, averaging 20 or more yards per catch in five games and finishing with a gaudy 17.4 mark overall. His 12 touchdowns easily led the receivers group despite Favre's penchant for finding Driver when in trouble.

McCarthy is expecting big things out of Jennings, so the third-year receiver will have to continue building strength in his legs so he can be more explosive after the catch and more durable overall. He hasn't taken a lot of big hits, but at 5-11 and 197 pounds he's not what you would consider a big receiver.

Driver hasn't shown a huge decline and keeps himself in top physical condition, but he'll have to fight off second-year pro James Jones. Last year, Jones excelled at running crossing patterns and even beat Champ Bailey deep for a touchdown, but he faded badly at the end of the season. Tight end will be ably handled by veteran Donald Lee, who improves every year and is refining his route-running. **GRADE: B+**

Offensive line » Since 2005, the offensive line has not held up its end of the bargain in the running game, and it's either sink or swim for a bunch of interior linemen competing to start at guard. Left tackle Chad Clifton had an outstanding year and didn't show any signs of breaking down despite his many injuries, while right tackle Mark Tauscher remains a heady, competent all-around blocker who had to play through a painful ankle injury much of last year.

Inside, the club hasn't settled the guard position. Jason Spitz had far more success at right guard than Daryn Colledge did on the left side and, as a result, Colledge's hold on a starting job will be more tenuous. Those two, along with athletic and aggressive Allen Barbre, off-and-on starter Junius Coston and fourth-round draft choice Josh Sitton, will be in the mix for starting jobs. **GRADE: B-**

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		
QB	Aaron Rodgers	Brian Brohm
FB	Korey Hall	John Kuhn
RB	Ryan Grant	Brandon Jackson
WR	Greg Jennings	Jordy Nelson
WR	Donald Driver	James Jones
TE	Donald Lee	Tory Humphrey
LT	Chad Clifton	Daryn Colledge
LG	Allen Barbre	Daryn Colledge
C	Scott Wells	Jason Spitz
RG	Jason Spitz	Tony Moll
RT	Mark Tauscher	Tony Moll
DEFENSE		
LE	Aaron Kampman	Mike Montgomery
DT	Ryan Pickett	Colin Cole
DT	Johnny Jolly	Justin Harrell
RE	Cullen Jenkins	Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila
SLB	Brandon Chillar	Brady Poppinga
MLB	Nick Barnett	Desmond Bishop
WLB	A.J. Hawk	Tracy White
LCB	Charles Woodson	Tramon Williams
SS	Atari Bigby	Charlie Peprah
FS	Nick Collins	Aaron Rouse
RCB	Al Harris	Will Blackmon
SPECIALISTS		
K	Mason Crosby	
P	Jon Ryan	
KR	Tramon Williams	
PR	Will Blackmon	
LS	Thomas Gafford	

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 Minnesota — SEPT. 8 | 7:00 — SCORE
WEEK 2 @ Detroit — SEPT. 14 | 1:00 — SCORE
WEEK 3 Dallas — SEPT. 21 | 8:15 — SCORE
WEEK 4 @ Tampa Bay — SEPT. 28 | 1:00 — SCORE
WEEK 5 Atlanta — OCT. 5 | 1:00 — SCORE
WEEK 6 @ Seattle — OCT. 12 | 4:15 — SCORE
WEEK 7 Indianapolis — OCT. 19 | 4:15 — SCORE
» WEEK 8 *OPEN DATE*
WEEK 9 @ Tennessee — NOV. 2 | 1:00 — SCORE
WEEK 10 @ Minnesota — NOV. 9 | 1:00 — SCORE
WEEK 11 Chicago — NOV. 16 | 1:00 — SCORE
WEEK 12 @ New Orleans — NOV. 24 | 8:30 — SCORE
WEEK 13 Carolina — NOV. 30 | 1:00 — SCORE
WEEK 14 Houston — DEC. 7 | 1:00 — SCORE
WEEK 15 @ Jacksonville — DEC. 14 | 1:00 — SCORE
WEEK 16 @ Chicago — DEC. 22 | 8:30 — SCORE
WEEK 17 Detroit — DEC. 28 | 1:00 — SCORE

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/09	W	16-13	Philadelphia Eagles
09/16	W	35-13	at New York Giants
09/23	W	31-24	San Diego Chargers
09/30	W	23-16	at Minnesota Vikings
10/07	L	20-27	Chicago Bears
10/14	W	17-14	Washington Redskins
10/29	W	19-13	at Denver Broncos
11/04	W	33-22	at Kansas City Chiefs
11/11	W	34-0	Minnesota Vikings
11/18	W	31-17	Carolina Panthers
11/22	W	37-26	at Detroit Lions
11/29	L	27-37	at Dallas Cowboys
12/09	W	38-7	Oakland Raiders
12/16	W	33-14	at St. Louis Rams
12/23	L	7-35	at Chicago Bears
12/30	W	34-13	Detroit Lions

WON 13, LOST 3

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Grant	188	956	5.1	66t	8
Jackson	75	267	3.6	46	1
Wynn	50	203	4.1	44	4
Morency	29	108	3.7	15	0
Rodgers	7	29	4.1	13	0
Favre	29	12	0.4	21	0
Ryan	2	7	3.5	7	0
Nall	5	6	1.2	8	0
Robinson	1	5	5.0	5	0
Driver	2	4	2.0	5	0
PACKERS	**388**	**1597**	**4.1**	**66t**	**13**
OPPONENTS	424	1647	3.9	55	6

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Driver	82	1048	12.8	47	2
Jennings	53	920	17.4	82t	12
Lee	48	575	12.0	60	6
Jones	47	676	14.4	79t	2
Grant	30	145	4.8	21	0
Morency	30	199	6.6	18	0
Robinson	21	241	11.5	43	1
Franks	18	132	7.3	24	3
Jackson	16	130	8.1	16	0
Martin	16	242	15.1	36	4
Wynn	9	73	8.1	18	0
Hall	8	49	6.1	10	0
Krause	2	11	5.5	6	0
Kuhn	2	7	3.5	5	0
Bodiford	1	13	13.0	13	0
PACKERS	**383**	**4461**	**11.6**	**82t**	**30**
OPPONENTS	295	3584	12.1	50	23

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Favre	535	356	4155	28	15
Rodgers	28	20	218	1	0
Nall	15	7	88	1	0
PACKERS	**578**	**383**	**4461**	**30**	**15**
OPPONENTS	534	295	3584	23	19

SACKS — **PACKERS 36, OPPONENTS 19**

Kampman 12, Gbaja-Biamila 9.5, Williams 7, Barnett 3.5, Hawk 1, Jenkins 1, Jolly 1, Pickett 1

DEFENSE

Little ever changes with coordinator Bob Sanders' defense.

He plays his standard four-across coverage with the cornerbacks in press mode on almost every down. Sanders doesn't blitz a lot and relies on speedy linebackers Nick Barnett and A.J. Hawk to clean up. This year, he'll have more versatility in the lineup with free-agent linebacker Brandon Chillar and emerging safety Aaron Rouse. The big question is whether McCarthy will command Sanders to be more aggressive on defense. The pass rush wore down late last season and the defensive line had less success getting to the quarterback than it did early in the year. Sanders tried to blitz more, but it didn't work because the unit does it so rarely.

Defensive line Much of the line's success will depend on how well it replaces departed Corey Williams.

The most versatile of the group, Williams' tough-guy playing style will be missed at both tackle and end. The key will be replacing him at the three-technique position, where 2007 first-round draft choice Justin Harrell needs to mature quickly and veteran Johnny Jolly must overcome a torn rotator cuff.

If Jolly is healthy, it will be hard to keep him off the field because he plays the run well and adds some toughness to the group. Regardless, the coaches will continue to use a seven- or eight-man rotation that will allow both to play a lot.

Harrell has bulk, long arms and a decent get-off, but he's far from a finished product and was pretty much invisible as a rookie. If he can improve, the combination of him and nose tackle Ryan Pickett will make for a tough combo to block on running downs.

On the outside, end Aaron Kampman remains one of the best pass rushers in the game, but Cullen Jenkins did not produce the way the coaches hoped after moving him from the inside. Jenkins has to play a lot better or the club will have to consider elevating Michael Montgomery, Jason Hunter or rookie Jeremy Thompson to a starting position.

It's possible linebacker Brady Poppinga will get some snaps at rush end on passing downs, but if the club is willing to pay Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila's $6.15 million base salary, he'll still be their designated third-down rusher. **GRADE: A-**

Linebackers There aren't many combinations more athletic than Barnett and Hawk, yet they haven't come close to realizing their potential. Barnett had a breakout year with 165 tackles, two interceptions and 3.5 sacks, firmly

DONALD DRIVER ▶ WR

OFFSEASON MOVES

ADDITIONS:
LB **Brandon Chillar** *(FA, Rams)*

SUBTRACTIONS:
QB **Brett Favre** *(retired)*, TE **Bubba Franks** *(FA/Jets)*, TE **Ryan Krause** *(FA)*, LS **Rob Davis** *(retired)*, DB **Frank Walker** *(FA/Ravens)*, **QB Craig Nall** *(FA)*

PACKERS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1 Ray Nitschke *(1958-72)*

A Hall-of-Fame tackling machine who was the heart and soul of Vince Lombardi's defense. He and the Bears' Dick Butkus were most responsible for the NFC Central's "Black and Blue Division" nickname.

2 Dave Robinson *(1963-72)*

Some think he was better than Nitschke, and Robinson probably deserves consideration for the Hall of Fame. He played in 124 games, had 21 interceptions and was a three-time Pro Bowler.

3 Fred Carr *(1968-77)*

A very athletic outside linebacker who was a force on some poor Packer teams during the 1970s. Carr never missed a game in 10 years and made three Pro Bowls.

ALBERT DICKSON / SN

INSIDE THE HEADSET

MIKE McCARTHY

McCarthy runs the show. He wants to run the ball and force teams to commit to stopping it so he can utilize an effective play-action game. But as he showed last year, he's also willing to spread teams out with three- and four-receiver sets. McCarthy runs a very traditional West Coast offense similar to Seattle's and works very hard at exploiting matchups he thinks he can win.

entrenching himself as the defense's leader. He covered sideline to sideline, lessened his number of blown coverages and timed his shots into the backfield much better.

Hawk did not have the same impact, however, and can merely be categorized as solid. He had 129 tackles, but just one sack, one forced fumble and one interception. Those aren't the numbers of a No. 5 overall pick in the draft. Hawk's coverage improved, but he needs to make more game-changing plays.

The addition of Chillar will create competition for Poppinga on the strong side. **GRADE: B+**

Secondary » How much longer can Charles Woodson and Al Harris hang on? That's the million-dollar question.

Both suffered injuries that affected their ability to perform, yet Woodson had a very good year and Harris was solid until a couple of late-season meltdowns against Terrell Owens and Plaxico Burress. Woodson is 31 and Harris 33, and the club has to be prepared to replace them if they decline quickly.

There are some prospects, but the nickel position had a rotating door on it until late in the season when Tramon Williams took over. The speedy and deceptively tough Williams needs a lot of technique work to be considered a starter and will get competition from Will Blackmon, Jarrett Bush and Patrick Lee for the job.

At safety, Atari Bigby made big strides in his first year as a starter, but he's always going to lack man-to-man coverage skills and fit better in the box. He's a big hitter with good straight-line speed, but not much flexibility. His starting mate, Nick Collins, was a disappointment during his third season and could find himself in trouble if Rouse plays the way he did in spot duty last year. **GRADE: B**

SPECIAL TEAMS

This is an area Thompson has spent countless draft picks on trying to improve. The kicking game got a shot in the arm with the selection of kicker Mason Crosby, who as a rookie led the NFL in scoring. He handled the cold conditions fairly well, hit just under 80 percent of his field-goal attempts and ranked third in the league in touchbacks with 14. Punter Jon Ryan improved considerably and ranked ninth in gross average (44.4) and 12th in net (36.7). The return game depends a lot on Blackmon staying healthy and Koren Robinson regaining at least some of his Pro Bowl form from 2005. **GRADE: B**

BOTTOM LINE

There's talent all over this team, especially on the D-line and at wideout, but Green Bay will succeed or fail based on the play of Rodgers.

90

FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT

STEADY

ROSTER

QUARTERBACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
12 Rodgers, Aaron	QB	6-2	223	12/02/1983	3	California

OFFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
78 Barbre, Allen	T	6-4	300	06/22/1984	1	Missouri Southern St.
76 Clifton, Chad	T	6-5	320	06/26/1976	8	Tennessee
73 Colledge, Daryn	G	6-4	305	02/11/1982	2	Boise State
62 Coston, Junius	T	6-3	313	11/05/1983	3	North Carolina A&T
61 Keenan, Ryan	G	6-5	295	08/18/1983	0	Northwestern
75 Moll, Tony	G	6-5	304	08/23/1983	2	Nevada
72 Spitz, Jason	G/C	6-3	300	12/19/1982	2	Louisville
67 Stephenson, Cameron	G	6-3	314	06/18/1983	0	Rutgers
65 Tauscher, Mark	T	6-3	315	06/17/1977	8	Wisconsin
69 Thompson, Orrin	T	6-6	322	11/11/1982	0	Duke
70 Toledo, Joe	T	6-5	337	10/20/1982	0	Washington
63 Wells, Scott	C	6-2	295	01/17/1981	4	Tennessee

RUNNING BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
25 Grant, Ryan	RB	6-1	218	12/09/1982	1	Notre Dame
35 Hall, Korey	RB	6-0	236	08/05/1983	1	Boise State
23 Herron, Noah	RB	5-11	218	04/03/1982	2	Northwestern
32 Jackson, Brandon	RB	5-10	212	10/02/1985	1	Nebraska
30 Kuhn, John	RB	6-0	255	09/09/1982	2	Shippensburg
34 Morency, Vernand	RB	5-10	212	02/04/1980	3	Oklahoma State
45 White, Corey	RB	6-1	239	10/01/1985	0	UAB
42 Wynn, DeShawn	RB	5-10	232	10/09/1983	1	Florida

RECEIVERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
19 Bodiford, Shaun	WR	5-11	186	05/04/1982	2	Portland State
80 Driver, Donald	WR	6-0	190	02/02/1975	9	Alcorn State
83 Francies, Chris	WR	6-1	193	07/26/1982	2	UTEP
84 Humphrey, Tory	TE	6-2	250	01/20/1983	2	Central Michigan
85 Jennings, Greg	WR	5-11	197	09/21/1983	2	Western Michigan
89 Jones, James	WR	6-1	207	03/31/1984	1	San Jose State
86 Lee, Donald	TE	6-4	248	08/31/1980	5	Mississippi State
82 Martin, Ruvell	WR	6-4	210	08/10/1982	2	Saginaw Valley
81 Robinson, Koren	WR	6-1	205	03/19/1980	7	North Carolina State

DEFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
93 Bolston, Conrad	DT	6-4	300	01/09/1985	1	Maryland
90 Cole, Colin	DT	6-1	315	06/24/1980	4	Iowa
94 Gbaja-Biamila, Kabeer	DE	6-4	247	09/24/1977	8	San Diego State
91 Harrell, Justin	DT	6-4	310	02/14/1984	1	Tennessee
57 Hunter, Jason	DE	6-4	250	08/28/1983	2	Appalachian State
77 Jenkins, Cullen	DE	6-2	303	01/20/1981	4	Central Michigan
97 Jolly, Johnny	DT	6-3	312	02/21/1983	2	Texas A&M
74 Kampman, Aaron	DE	6-4	270	11/30/1979	6	Iowa
98 Malone, Alfred	DE	6-5	308	02/21/1982	2	Troy
96 Montgomery, Michael	DE	6-5	265	08/18/1983	3	Texas A&M
95 Muir, Daniel	DT	6-2	298	09/12/1983	1	Kent State
79 Pickett, Ryan	DT	6-2	322	10/08/1979	7	Ohio State

DEFENSIVE BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
20 Bigby, Atari	S	5-11	211	09/19/1981	3	UCF
27 Blackmon, Will	CB	6-0	202	10/27/1984	2	Boston College
24 Bush, Jarrett	CB	6-0	197	05/21/1984	2	Utah State
36 Collins, Nick	S	5-11	200	08/16/1983	3	Bethune-Cookman
29 Culver, Tyrone	S	6-1	200	07/06/1983	1	Fresno State
31 Harris, Al	CB	6-1	188	12/07/1974	10	Texas A&M-Kingsville
26 Peprah, Charlie	S	5-11	202	02/24/1983	2	Alabama
40 Porter, Joe	CB	5-10	198	11/27/1985	0	Rutgers
37 Rouse, Aaron	S	6-4	223	01/08/1984	1	Virginia Tech
38 Williams, Tramon	CB	5-11	182	03/16/1983	1	Louisiana Tech
21 Woodson, Charles	CB	6-1	200	10/07/1976	10	Michigan

LINEBACKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
56 Barnett, Nick	LB	6-2	232	05/27/1981	5	Oregon State
55 Bishop, Desmond	LB	6-2	241	07/24/1984	1	California
54 Chillar, Brandon	LB	6-3	242	10/21/1982	4	UCLA
53 Havner, Spencer	LB	6-3	244	02/02/1983	0	UCLA
50 Hawk, A.J.	LB	6-1	247	01/06/1984	2	Ohio State
52 Hodge, Abdul	LB	6-0	229	09/09/1982	1	Iowa
51 Poppinga, Brady	LB	6-3	245	09/21/1979	3	Brigham Young
59 White, Tracy	LB	6-0	234	04/14/1981	5	Howard

KICKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
2 Crosby, Mason	K	6-1	212	09/03/1984	1	Colorado
9 Ryan, Jon	P	6-0	202	11/26/1981	2	Regina

▶ **MIKE McCARTHY,** *Head coach*

Joe Philbin, off. coord.; **Bob Sanders**, def. coord.; **Winston Moss**, asst. head coach/linebackers; **Edgar Bennett**, running backs; **James Campen**, off. line; **Tom Clements**, quarterbacks; **Jerry Fontenot**, asst. off. line; **Ben McAdoo**, tight ends; **Jimmy Robinson**, wide receivers; **Carl Hairston**, def. ends; **Robert Nunn**, def. tackles; **Kurt Schottenheimer**, secondary; **Lionel Washington**, def. nickel package/cornerbacks; **Mike Stock**, special teams coord; **Shawn Slocum**, asst. special teams

HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL

MINNESOTA VIKINGS

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE

(an opponent breaks down the Vikings)

"It's pretty clear to me that the Vikings need their quarterback to play well this year. If (Tarvaris Jackson) is better than he was last year, which he should be, they have a chance to win that division with all the moves that they made.

"You can't overemphasize how important this is. It all comes down to the quarterback. I like Tarvaris on occasion, but then he reminds you he's a youngster. I think he practices fairly well. It takes a while for a West Coast (offense) quarterback to be proficient in everything he does, but he has a chance. The jury is still out in my mind.

"The big thing he needs to learn is to that it's OK to throw the ball away and live for another play. That is an art form, and it takes time. Last year you saw him throw it up for grabs a few times in critical situations. He has the physical skills. He just has to learn when and how to use them."

Highlighted by Allen acquisition, busy offseason hikes Vikes' hopes

By Kevin Seifert, *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*

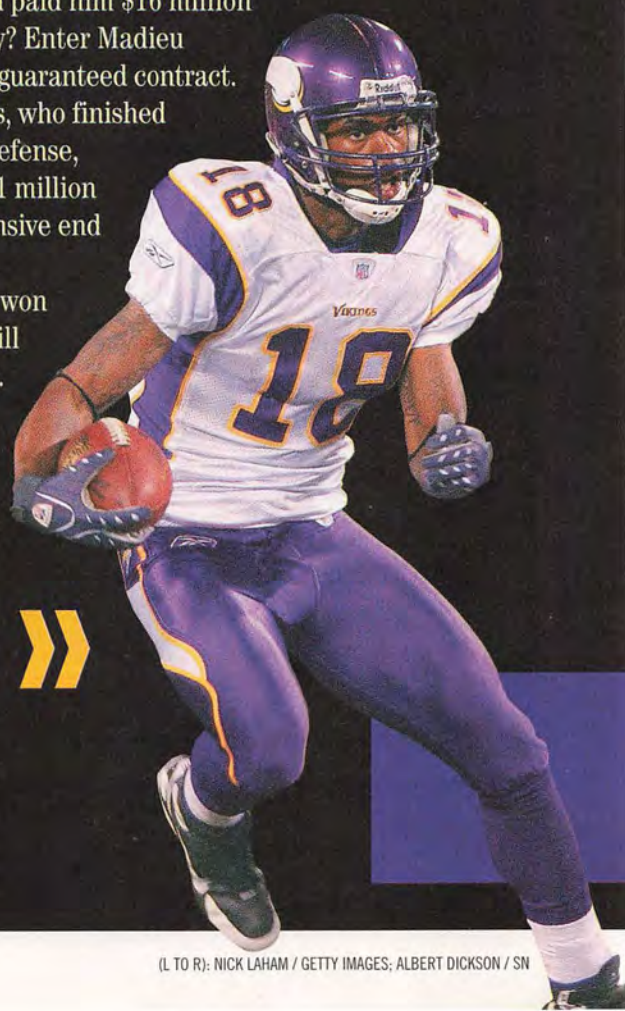
The Vikings and their new owner are tired of waiting. After missing the playoffs in his first three seasons as owner, Zygi Wilf authorized an offseason spending spree he hopes will catapult his team into Super Bowl contention.

At every turn, the Vikings pursued the top player at their positions of need. Need a big-play receiver? Wilf sent his private plane to whisk Bernard Berrian into town and paid him $16 million guaranteed. How about a cover safety? Enter Madieu Williams, who accepted a $13 million guaranteed contract.

And then, for the finale, the Vikings, who finished the 2007 season ranked last in pass defense, surrendered three draft picks and $31 million guaranteed to acquire Pro Bowl defensive end Jared Allen from Kansas City.

Those moves, added to a team that won five of its last seven games in 2007, will make the Vikings a playoff contender.

"Our goal is to win a championship," Wilf says, "and I think we're getting closer to that goal."

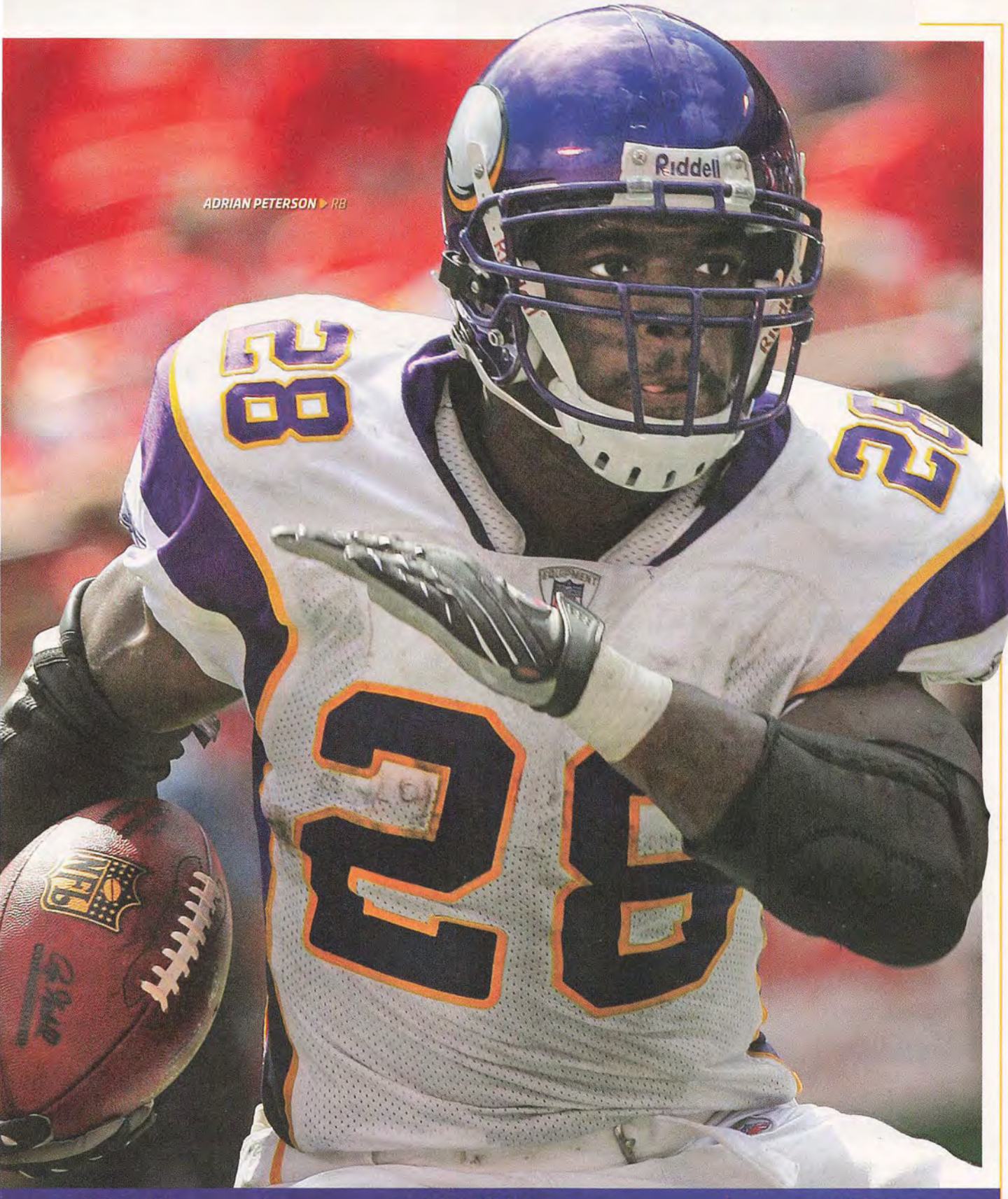


BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

SIDNEY RICE ▸ WR

Rice turned 21 as a rookie, but was more polished than most young receivers. He uses his 6-4 frame to position defenders away from the ball, and is especially adept in the red zone. With fellow wideout Bernard Berrian garnering more and more attention, Rice is poised for a big scoring season.

(L TO R): NICK LAHAM / GETTY IMAGES; ALBERT DICKSON / SN



ONLINE

www.sportingnews.com/nfl/teams/vikings
www.vikings.com

2007 RECORD

OVERALL: 8-8 ▶ HOME: 5-3

STADIUM

HUBERT H. HUMPHREY METRODOME
Capacity: 63,720
Turf: Artificial Tickets: 612-338-4537
Training Camp: Minnesota State University-Mankato, Mankato, Minn.; 507-387-3335

SN PICK

3
NFC NORTH
(9-7)

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 @ Green Bay — SEPT. 8 | 7:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 2 Indianapolis — SEPT. 14 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 3 Carolina — SEPT. 21 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 4 @ Tennessee — SEPT. 28 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 5 @ New Orleans — OCT. 6 | 8:30 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 6 Detroit — OCT. 12 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 7 @ Chicago — OCT. 19 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 8 *OPEN DATE*

WEEK 9 Houston — NOV. 2 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 10 Green Bay — NOV. 9 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 11 @ Tampa Bay — NOV. 16 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 12 @ Jacksonville — NOV. 23 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 13 Chicago — NOV. 30 | 8:15 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 14 @ Detroit — DEC. 7 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 15 @ Arizona — DEC. 14 | 4:05 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 16 Atlanta — DEC. 21 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

WEEK 17 New York Giants — DEC. 28 | 1:00 — SCORE (W / L)

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

THE BOOK ON ... JARED ALLEN

(how a rival sizes him up)

"It wasn't hard to figure out why the Vikings had such keen interest in him. If you look at the Vikings' defense, obviously it was terrific against the run a year ago. But it was suspect against the pass. There is an old axiom that the best pass coverage is a pass rush. You look at the Super Bowl and the way the New York Giants played, and it showed that an average secondary can do a terrific job because of pass-rush pressure.

"So if you look at the Vikings, with Jared Allen, that is a huge boost to their defense. He's not Reggie White or Bruce Smith and never will be. But he is just a guy that you want on your team, most importantly because of the production but also because he has a high motor that is infectious to the other players. He works hard and stirs things up a bit, and most coaches like that combination."

OFFENSE

Offensive coordinator Darrell Bevell utilizes a run-oriented version of the West Coast offense that centers on running backs Adrian Peterson and Chester Taylor. Most of the plays require zone-blocking technique from the offensive linemen. Not surprisingly, the most effective pass plays come on play-action and bootlegs. As quarterback Tarvaris Jackson develops, however, Bevell plans to add more downfield passing plays. Bevell calls the plays, with input from coach Brad Childress.

Quarterbacks Much of the team's success this season depends on significant progress by Jackson. He has shown flashes of being a mobile and strong-armed passer, winning eight of 12 starts in 2007, but he has also been plagued by injuries and poor decision-making. It can take up to five years for quarterbacks to develop, but the Vikings are betting Jackson can get it done sooner.

He has plenty going in his favor: the NFL's top running game, an improved set of receivers led by Berrian and a scheme that doesn't ask for many big plays in the passing game. Childress gave Jackson three goals for his offseason study sessions: reduce turnovers, learn to throw the ball away and be more willing to make check-down passes. Jackson will have to improve in all three areas for the Vikings to make a playoff run.

Unlike last season, however, the Vikings have hedged their bet by signing an established veteran backup should Jackson falter. Gus Frerotte will be 37 when the season begins, but he is capable of navigating the offense on a short-term basis.

Fifth-round rookie John David Booty is an intriguing prospect because he excelled in a similar offense at Southern Cal, but he is not likely to see the field in 2008. **GRADE: C**

Running backs Peterson alone could give a team one of the NFL's top rushing attacks. But the presence of Taylor gives the Vikings the best one-two punch in the league.

Peterson has a rare blend of speed and power, and his instinctive moves have frozen even the most seasoned defenders. He was on pace for a 2,000-yard season for much of 2007 before being slowed by a knee injury and later some impatience against new defensive schemes.

His knee is now healed, though, and Peterson spent much of the offseason studying defensive fronts with running backs coach Eric Bieniemy.

5-YEAR WINS TREND

NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	336.2	13
RUSHING	164.6	1
PASSING	171.6	28
SCORING	365	15
PUNT RETURNS	8.3	21
KICK RETURNS	24.8	5
RED ZONE TD %	60.0	5t
TOTAL DEFENSE	338.1	20
AGAINST RUSH	74.1	1
AGAINST PASS	264.1	32
POINTS ALLOWED	311	12
INTERCEPTIONS	15	20t
SACKS	38	8
TURNOVER DIFF.	+1	13t

Peterson must accept that he will have to find yardage against defenses specifically designed to stop him in 2008. Patience should be his top priority.

Taylor is less explosive than Peterson but runs just as hard. He could start for many teams, but has accepted a rotation with Peterson that should allow both players to stay fresh through the course of a season. Taylor will also share third-down duties with newcomer Maurice Hicks.

ALBERT DICKSON / SN

Fullback Thomas Tapeh will replace Tony Richardson, and it's likely the team will use Tapeh more in the passing game. Tapeh is a strong blocker and will give the team some tough short-yardage production. **GRADE: A**

Receivers » The addition of Berrian finally gives the team a wide receiver who will draw double teams. That's a critical variable the offense has been lacking since the 2005 trade of Randy Moss. Berrian is not nearly as explosive as Moss, but knows how to get open and has a knack for making downfield plays. His presence will at least make defenses think twice before stacking the box against Peterson.

Berrian will also allow some of the team's other receivers to play roles they're more suited for. Bobby Wade will be able to focus on his strength as a slot receiver, while second-year player Sidney Rice should face no worse than single coverage opposite of Berrian. With defenders' attention elsewhere, Rice could emerge as a consistent threat, especially in the red zone because of his 6-4 frame.

Veteran Robert Ferguson's physical downfield blocking is his best attribute. Ferguson and second-year player Aundrae Allison will provide depth that the team didn't have a year ago at this time.

The Vikings are hoping for a big improvement from tight end Visanthe Shiancoe, who dropped three touchdown passes in 2007 but is being counted on to make important catches in 2008. Backup Jim Kleinsasser is primarily a blocker, so the team might have to look elsewhere if Shiancoe can't level out his receiving skills. **GRADE: B**

Offensive line » If all goes well, the team should have one of the better lines in football. Nothing is certain, however, because tackle Bryant McKinnie wasn't scheduled to find out until the summer whether he will face NFL discipline for an offseason arrest in downtown Miami.

McKinnie generally plays just below a Pro Bowl level, but losing him even for a few games would deal the Vikings a blow because they have no proven backup at the position. Utility backup Artis Hicks would be the likely replacement, but he could struggle against the game's best pass rushers.

The strength of the line remains in the middle, where guards Steve Hutchinson and Anthony Herrera surround Pro Bowl center Matt Birk. Although Birk skipped the team's offseason workout program, he is expected to report in time for training camp. The three interior linemen, who excel either in one-on-one or zone blocking, are a big reason why the Vikings ran the ball so well last year.

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

	OFFENSE		
QB	Tarvaris Jackson	Gus Frerotte
FB	Thomas Tapeh	Jeff Dugan
RB	Adrian Peterson	Chester Taylor
WR	Bernard Berrian	Bobby Wade
WR	Sidney Rice	Robert Ferguson
TE	Visanthe Shiancoe	Jim Kleinsasser
LT	Bryant McKinnie	Artis Hicks
LG	Steve Hutchinson	Artis Hicks
C	Matt Birk	Ryan Cook
RG	Anthony Herrera	Artis Hicks
RT	Ryan Cook	Marcus Johnson

	DEFENSE	
LE	Ray Edwards	Brian Robison
DT	Kevin Williams	Fred Evans
DT	Pat Williams	Fred Evans
RE	Jared Allen	Brian Robison
SLB	Ben Leber	Heath Farwell
MLB	E.J. Henderson	Derrick Pope
WLB	Chad Greenway	Heath Farwell
LCB	Antoine Winfield	Charles Gordon
RCB	Cedric Griffin	Marcus McCauley
FS	Darren Sharper	Tyrell Johnson
SS	Madieu Williams	Michael Boulware

	SPECIALISTS
K	Ryan Longwell
P	Chris Kluwe
KR	Maurice Hicks
PR	Bobby Wade
LS	Cullen Loeffler

BRUCE KLUCKHOHN / US PRESSWIRE

VIKINGS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1 Scott Studwell *(1977-90)*

Toughness made the two-time Pro Bowler the heart and soul of the Vikings for 14 seasons.

2 Matt Blair *(1974-85)*

Six-time Pro Bowler was a great athlete and first-team All-Pro in 1980.

3 Jeff Siemon *(1972-82)*

Unsung star who played behind the Purple People Eaters.

» DRAFT REPORT GRADE ▸ B-

The Vikings were able to address a problem in 2007 by selecting safety **Tyrell Johnson** out of Arkansas State. He is very physical and performs well in both run and pass support, but will need to become more consistent to become a top starter. In time and with improvement, Johnson should be able to eventually start. Grabbing QB **John David Booty** in the fifth round was a good value pick, as he has a quick release, solid arm strength and decent accuracy. However, Booty will need to improve his defensive reads in order to be anything more than a backup in the NFL. Defensive tackle **Letroy Guion**, who has size and strength, isn't likely to be called upon to start this season, but he has the talent to become a quality starter down the road. Center **John Sullivan** was a good sixth-round pick, given his above-average ability in run and pass blocking. He will need to improve his strength and aggressiveness, however. **Jaymar Johnson** is a raw receiver who jumped up into the draft with an excellent spring and will need to continue improving to stick with the Vikings.

» 2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
2	12	Johnson, Tyrell	S	6-1	205	Arkansas State
5	2	Booty, John David	QB	6-3	215	USC
5	17	Guion, Letroy	DT	6-4	295	Florida State
6	21	Sullivan, John	C	6-4	301	Notre Dame
6	27	Johnson, Jaymar	WR	6-0	176	Jackson State

BOOTY ▸ QB

ROSTER

QUARTERBACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
9 Bollinger, Brooks	QB	6-1	205	11/15/1979	4	Wisconsin
12 Frerotte, Gus	QB	6-3	233	07/31/1971	14	Tulsa
7 Jackson, Tarvaris	QB	6-2	232	04/21/1983	2	Alabama State

OFFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
78 Birk, Matt	C	6-4	308	07/23/1976	9	Harvard
62 Cook, Ryan	T	6-6	328	05/08/1983	2	New Mexico
63 Daniels, Brian	G	6-4	303	10/31/1984	0	Colorado
64 Herrera, Anthony	G	6-2	315	06/14/1980	3	Tennessee
79 Hicks, Artis	G	6-4	335	11/28/1978	5	Memphis
76 Hutchinson, Steve	G	6-5	313	11/01/1977	7	Michigan
75 Johnson, Chase	T	6-8	330	12/16/1983	0	Wyoming
72 Johnson, Marcus	T	6-6	321	12/01/1981	3	Mississippi
46 Loeffler, Cullen	C	6-5	241	01/27/1981	4	Texas
74 McKinnie, Bryant	T	6-8	335	09/23/1979	6	Miami (FL)

RUNNING BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
43 Hicks, Maurice	RB	5-11	205	07/22/1978	4	North Carolina A&T
28 Peterson, Adrian	RB	6-1	217	03/21/1985	1	Oklahoma
38 Tahi, Naufahu	RB	6-0	254	10/30/1981	1	Brigham Young
44 Tapeh, Thomas	RB	6-1	243	03/28/1980	3	Minnesota
29 Taylor, Chester	RB	5-11	213	09/22/1979	6	Toledo
32 Whitlock, Arkee	RB	5-9	203	05/10/1984	0	Southern Illinois

RECEIVERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
84 Allison, Aundrae	WR	6-0	198	04/20/1986	1	East Carolina
87 Berrian, Bernard	WR	6-1	185	12/27/1980	4	Fresno State
83 Dugan, Jeff	TE	6-4	258	04/08/1981	4	Maryland
89 Ferguson, Robert	WR	6-1	209	12/17/1979	7	Texas A&M
17 Filani, Joel	WR	6-2	211	12/08/1983	0	Texas Tech
40 Kleinsasser, Jim	TE	6-3	272	01/31/1977	9	North Dakota
Little, Brent	WR	6-0	185	04/03/1983	0	Southern Illinois
45 Mills, Garrett	TE	6-1	235	10/12/1983	1	Tulsa
15 Nance, Martin	WR	6-3	212	05/26/1983	1	Miami (OH)
18 Rice, Sidney	WR	6-4	202	09/01/1986	1	South Carolina
81 Shiancoe, Visanthe	TE	6-4	250	06/18/1980	5	Morgan State
85 Surrency, Justin	WR	6-0	182	01/09/1984	0	Northern Iowa
19 Wade, Bobby	WR	5-10	190	02/25/1981	5	Arizona

DEFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
69 Allen, Jared	DE	6-6	270	04/03/1982	4	Idaho State
Allen, Kenderick	DT	6-5	328	09/14/1978	4	LSU
91 Edwards, Ray	DE	6-5	268	01/01/1985	2	Purdue
90 Evans, Fred	DT	6-4	305	11/06/1983	2	Texas State
73 Grigsby, Otis	DE	6-3	260	11/19/1980	1	Kentucky
99 James, Erasmus	DE	6-4	266	11/04/1982	3	Wisconsin
92 Mitchell, Jayme	DE	6-6	285	03/15/1984	2	Mississippi
96 Robison, Brian	DE	6-3	267	04/28/1983	1	Texas
95 Udeze, Kenechi	DE	6-3	281	03/05/1983	4	USC
93 Williams, Kevin	DT	6-5	311	08/16/1980	5	Oklahoma State
94 Williams, Pat	DT	6-3	317	10/24/1972	11	Texas A&M
95 Wyms, Ellis	DT	6-3	290	04/12/1979	7	Mississippi State

DEFENSIVE BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
27 Boulware, Michael	S	6-3	220	09/17/1981	4	Florida State
37 Frampton, Eric	S	5-11	205	02/06/1984	1	Washington State
41 Gordon, Charles	CB	5-11	180	07/18/1984	2	Kansas
23 Griffin, Cedric	CB	6-0	203	11/11/1982	2	Texas
33 McCann, Dee	S	5-11	198	04/24/1983	0	West Virginia
21 McCauley, Marcus	CB	6-0	203	09/03/1983	1	Fresno State
20 Sapp, Benny	CB	5-9	190	01/20/1981	4	Northern Iowa
42 Sharper, Darren	S	6-2	210	11/03/1975	11	William & Mary
20 Williams, Madieu	S	6-1	203	10/18/1981	4	Maryland
26 Winfield, Antoine	CB	5-9	180	06/24/1977	9	Ohio State

LINEBACKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
57 Alexander, Rufus	LB	6-1	228	04/12/1983	0	Oklahoma
50 Ciurciu, Vinny	LB	6-0	235	05/02/1980	5	Boston College
59 Farwell, Heath	LB	6-0	235	12/31/1981	3	San Diego State
52 Greenway, Chad	LB	6-2	242	01/12/1983	1	Iowa
56 Henderson, E.J.	LB	6-1	245	08/03/1980	5	Maryland
58 Herron, David	LB	6-1	239	06/17/1984	1	Michigan State
51 Leber, Ben	LB	6-3	244	12/07/1978	6	Kansas State
Pope, Derrick	LB	6-0	232	05/04/1982	4	Alabama
Sartz, Dallas	LB	6-5	240	07/08/1983	0	USC

KICKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
5 Kluwe, Chris	P	6-4	215	12/24/1981	3	UCLA
8 Longwell, Ryan	K	6-0	200	08/16/1974	11	California

BRAD CHILDRESS, *Head coach*

Darrell Bevell, off. coord.; **Leslie Frazier**, def. coord.; **Eric Bieniemy**, running backs; **Karl Dunbar**, def. line; **Paul Ferraro**, special teams cord.; **Jim Hueber**, asst. off. line; **Jimmie Johnson**, tight ends; **Derek Mason**, asst. def. backs; **Pat Morris**, off. line; **Brian Murphy**, asst. special teams; **Fred Pagac**, linebackers; **Kevin Rogers**, quarterbacks; **George Stewart**, wide receivers; **Joe Woods**, def. backs

Right tackle Ryan Cook could eventually return to center as Birk's long-term replacement. Cook is adequate as a tackle, however, and will remain a starter since the team was unable to upgrade the position in the offseason. **GRADE: B+**

DEFENSE

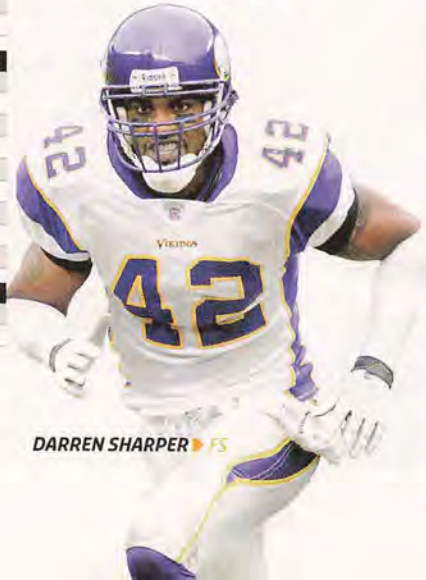
Defensive coordinator Leslie Frazier runs a version of the Tampa 2 defense that requires physical play by cornerbacks and strong coverage skills from safeties. Frazier also likes to mix in blitzes from all positions, a strategy he learned while playing in the Chicago Bears' 46 defense during the 1980s. The team plays a one-gap rush defense, which ranked No. 1 overall last season in the NFL.

Defensive line Allen's arrival gives the Vikings a dominant defensive line. Not only is he hard to block as a pass rusher, but he stands up surprisingly well against the run despite his 270-pound frame. Allen's long arms allow him to maintain separation from offensive linemen, one of many explanations for his success.

Allen figures to face a minimum of double teams because he will be playing next to Pro Bowl tackles Kevin Williams and Pat Williams. Kevin Williams requires a constant double team to stop, both against the run and the pass, while Pat Williams usually goes to the sideline in pass situations. Regardless of the blocking strategy, however, it has been nearly impossible to run inside against the "Williams Wall" for the past two seasons.

End Ray Edwards will move to the left side to accommodate Allen. Edwards is not a bad pass rusher in his own right, but a four-game suspension last year for steroid use makes him difficult to depend on full time.

Brian Robison and Jayme Mitchell will provide depth at end. The Vikings are hoping that fifth-round pick Letroy Guion can back up both tackle positions, but otherwise the Vikings are thin behind the Williamses. **GRADE: A**



DARREN SHARPER ▶ FS

OFFSEASON MOVES

ADDITIONS:

DB **Madieu Williams** *(FA/Bengals)*, LB **Dontarrious Thomas** *(FA/49ers)*, RB **Thomas Tapeh** *(FA/Eagles)*, WR **Bernard Berrian** *(FA/Bears)*, RB **Maurice Hicks** *(FA/49ers)*, LB **Derrick Pope** *(FA/Dolphins)*, DE **Ellis Wyms** *(FA/Seahawks)*, DB **Michael Boulware** *(FA/Texans)*, DB **Benny Sapp** *(FA/Chiefs)*, QB **Gus Frerotte** *(FA/Rams)*, DE **Jared Allen** *(trade/Chiefs)*

SUBTRACTIONS:

DB **Dwight Smith** *(FA/Lions)*, QB **Kelly Holcomb** *(FA)*, DB **Tank Williams** *(FA/Patriots)*, RB **Tony Richardson** *(FA/Jets)*, DB **Mike Doss** *(FA)*, DE **Darrion Scott** *(FA)*, RB **Mewelde Moore** *(FA/Steelers)*, DB **Ronyell Whitaker** *(FA)*, DT **Spencer Johnson** *(FA/Bills)*

INSIDE THE HEADSET

BRAD CHILDRESS

Childress has a conservative personality but is not afraid to make unconventional strategic calls, most notably on special teams—from early-game onside kicks to fake field goals in the fourth quarter of close games. Childress also conceives strategies to take advantage of relatively obscure rules.

(L TO R): SPORTPICS; HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL

FANTASY SPIN

http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football

PETERSON BERRIAN RICE

Even with upgrades at receiver and a great running game at his disposal, QB Tarvaris Jackson is nothing more than an emergency fantasy starter—at best.

BUY Adrian Peterson, RB

SELL Bernard Berrian, WR

SLEEPER Sidney Rice, WR

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/09	W	24-3	Atlanta Falcons
09/16	L	17-20	at Detroit Lions
09/23	L	10-13	at Kansas City Chiefs
09/30	L	16-23	Green Bay Packers
10/14	W	34-31	at Chicago Bears
10/21	L	14-24	at Dallas Cowboys
10/28	L	16-23	Philadelphia Eagles
11/04	W	35-17	San Diego Chargers
11/11	L	0-34	at Green Bay Packers
11/18	W	29-22	Oakland Raiders
11/25	W	41-17	at New York Giants
12/02	W	42-10	Detroit Lions
12/09	W	27-7	at San Francisco 49ers
12/17	W	20-13	Chicago Bears
12/23	L	21-32	Washington Redskins
12/30	L	19-22	at Denver Broncos

WON 8, LOST 8

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Peterson	238	1341	5.6	73t	12
Taylor	157	844	5.4	84t	7
Jackson	54	260	4.8	32	3
Moore	20	113	5.7	17	0
Williamson	2	29	14.5	26	0
Bollinger	5	18	3.6	10	0
Tahi	6	15	2.5	6	0
Richardson	7	13	1.9	4	0
Dugan	2	7	3.5	4	0
Allison	2	3	1.5	3	0
Wade	1	-9	-9.0	-9	0
VIKINGS	**494**	**2634**	**5.3**	**84t**	**22**
OPPONENTS	379	1185	3.1	30t	7

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Wade	54	647	12.0	40	3
Ferguson	32	391	12.2	71	1
Rice	31	396	12.8	60t	4
Taylor	29	281	9.7	50	0
Shiancoe	27	323	12.0	79	1
Peterson	19	268	14.1	60t	1
Williamson	18	240	13.3	60t	1
Richardson	11	89	8.1	12	0
Allison	8	122	15.3	35	0
Dugan	7	57	8.1	27	0
Moore	6	48	8.0	20	0
Kleinsasser	4	43	10.8	26	1
Mills	2	26	13.0	18	0
Tahi	1	7	7.0	7	0
VIKINGS	**249**	**2938**	**11.8**	**79**	**12**
OPPONENTS	415	4500	10.8	81t	22

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Jackson	294	171	1911	9	12
Holcomb	83	42	515	2	1
Bollinger	50	33	391	1	1
Rice	2	2	94	0	0
VIKINGS	**432**	**249**	**2938**	**12**	**14**
OPPONENTS	646	415	4500	22	15

SACKS VIKINGS 38, OPPONENTS 38

Edwards 5, Leber 5, Udeze 5, Henderson 4.5, Robison 4.5, Johnson 3, Williams 3, Williams 2, Evans 1, Grigsby 1, James 1, Mitchell 1

Linebackers Once a weakness of the team, this position now boasts three solid starters. Leading the way is E.J. Henderson, who was a Pro Bowl alternate after excelling in his return to the middle last year. Henderson's instincts and aggression allow him to play the run as well as any middle linebacker in the NFL. He's aided by the tackles in front of him and is learning to compensate for his average speed against the pass.

Like Henderson, Chad Greenway started all 16 games last season and he and Ben Leber (10) won't be challenged for the starting outside jobs in 2008. Leber is a consummate pro and almost never makes a mistake. He has decent pass-rushing skills and also holds his own in pass coverage.

Greenway is still learning the game but has the athletic skills and speed to be a long-term starter. Greenway must become a better open-field tackler and addressed that, in part, by adding 10 pounds during the offseason.

Newcomer Derrick Pope will serve as a backup at all three positions, while special-teams stars Heath Farwell and Vinny Ciurciu also provide depth. **GRADE: B**

Secondary The Vikings are undergoing a transition at safety, where Madieu Williams has replaced Dwight Smith and veteran Darren Sharper may be entering his final season.

Williams more closely fits Frazier's vision of a safety: First and foremost, he can run with most receivers and cover the deep half of the field. Williams is also a strong leader and had his best season in Cincinnati when Frazier was the Bengals' coordinator.

Sharper can still make big plays but the team does not always appreciate when he takes chances to go after an interception. He will turn 33 during the season and team officials took the first step toward replacing him during the draft's second round by selecting Arkansas State's Tyrell Johnson.

The Vikings consider Johnson a "complete" safety, one who can cover and also support the run well. Johnson could spend this season on special teams but is poised to replace Sharper as early as 2009. Veteran Michael Boulware will also provide depth.

Cornerbacks Antoine Winfield and Cedric Griffin are unlikely to be challenged for starting jobs. But a fierce competition will take place for the nickel-back spot among Marcus McCauley, Charles Gordon and free-agent newcomer Benny Sapp. Rogers finished last season at the position and probably has the best pure coverage skills of the three. **GRADE: B**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Placekicker Ryan Longwell achieved a career renaissance in 2007 by updating his offseason training regimen. Longwell added several yards to his kickoffs and pushed his range to about 55 yards. As always, Longwell remains deadly accurate inside of 40 yards.

Like Longwell, Chris Kluwe straightened out some struggles from 2006 and is now considered the team's long-term punter. Previously a strong-legged boomer, Kluwe has learned how to direct his kicks to one side of the field to help shrink the field for his coverage teams.

Farwell and Ciurciu are two veterans who play on all four coverage units. Farwell set a team record with 32 special-teams tackles in 2007, and the Vikings are paying him a hefty $1.4 million to continue providing that service in 2008.

The Vikings are hoping that free-agent pickup Hicks will take over the kickoff-return job, while Wade and sixth-round pick Jaymar Johnson are the top candidates to return punts. Johnson would be the preferable choice so that Wade can focus on offense. **GRADE: B+**

BOTTOM LINE

The Vikings operated this offseason as if they were a few players away from contending for the Super Bowl championship. They made clear improvements to their receiving corps and pass defense, but their success will depend on improvement at quarterback from Jackson.

If Jackson can limit mistakes and make a consistent number of plays in the downfield passing game, the Vikings will be a force to be reckoned with in NFC. If Jackson is unable to improve on his uneven 2007 performance, the team will have to fight to make the playoffs.

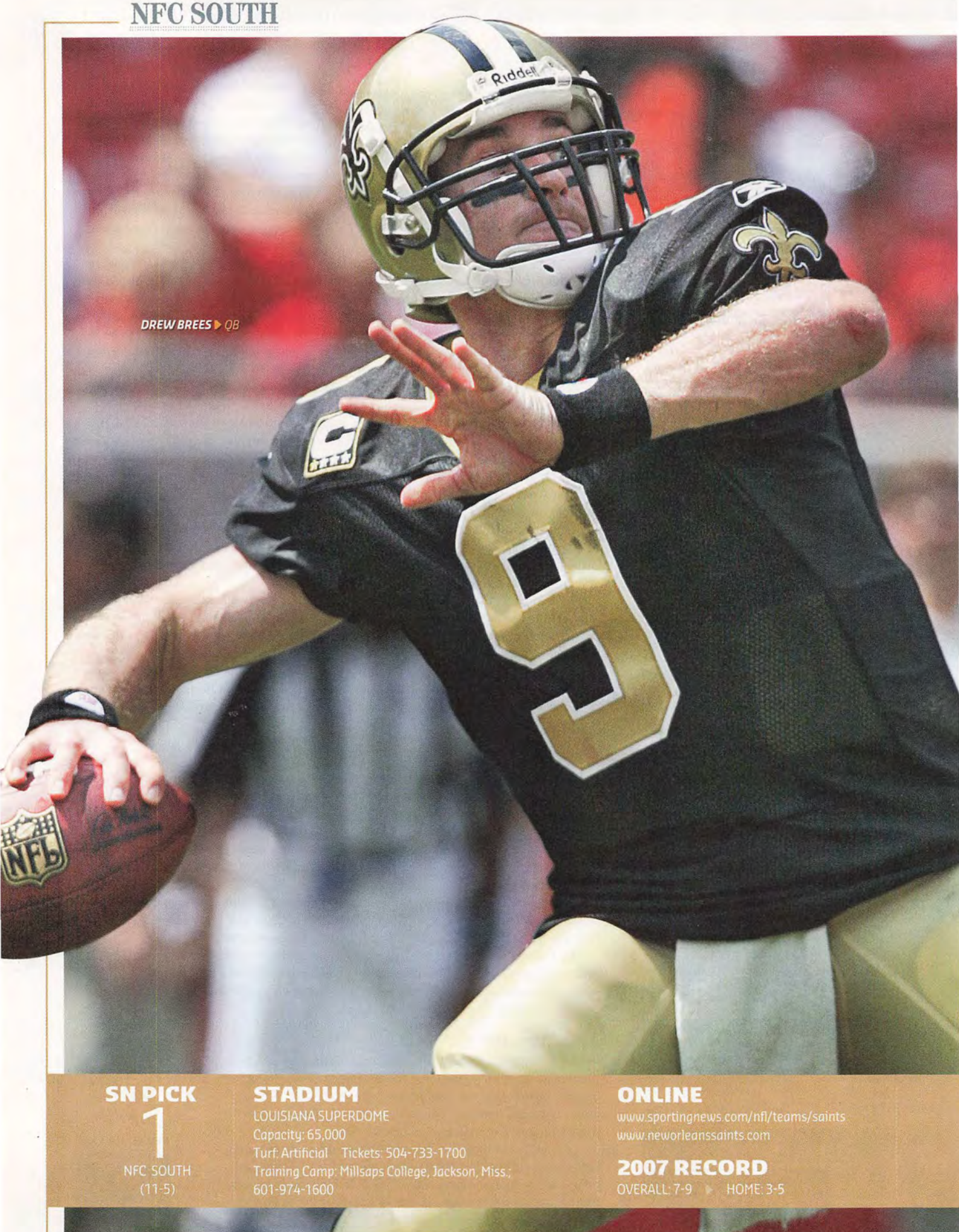
85

FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT

UP

HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL



DREW BREES ▶ QB

SN PICK
1
NFC SOUTH
(11-5)

STADIUM
LOUISIANA SUPERDOME
Capacity: 65,000
Turf: Artificial Tickets: 504-733-1700
Training Camp: Millsaps College, Jackson, Miss.; 601-974-1600

ONLINE
www.sportingnews.com/nfl/teams/saints
www.neworleanssaints.com

2007 RECORD
OVERALL: 7-9 ▶ HOME: 3-5

(L TO R): BOB LEVERONE / SN; SCOTT BOEHM / GETTY IMAGES; HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL

NEW ORLEANS SAINTS

Saints get defensive after disappointing '07 campaign

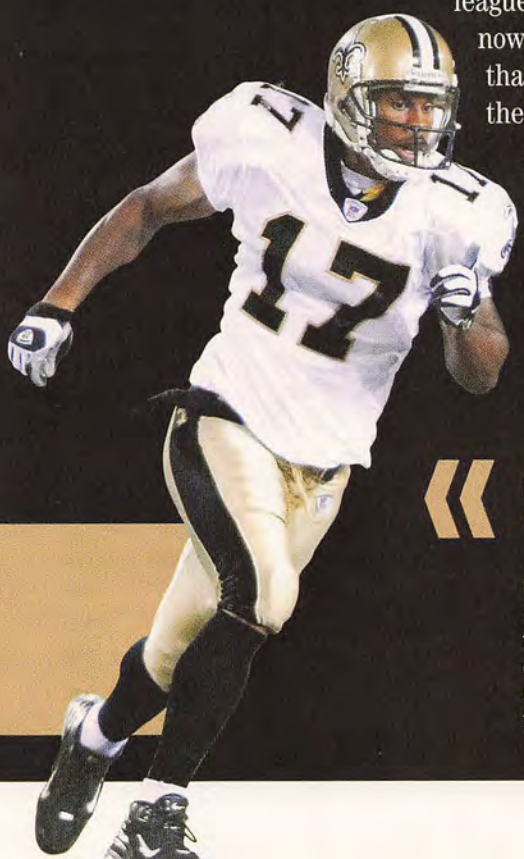
By Mike Triplett, *New Orleans Times-Picayune*

The New Orleans Saints have been one of the NFL's most surprising teams in each of the last two years. In 2006, they came out of nowhere to reach the NFC Championship Game. But last season, the Saints crawled right back to a 7-9 record.

This year, they'll prove which was the fluke.

The smart bet is that the Saints will return to peak form, battling for the NFC South title. New Orleans still has quarterback Drew Brees, receiver Marques Colston and tailback Reggie Bush leading one of the league's most dangerous offenses. And now the Saints have a rebuilt defense that they hope will hold up its end of the bargain.

"I think you have to go through an '07 in order to achieve the things we want to achieve long term," says Brees, who, in addition to being one of the NFL's top quarterbacks, is also the ultimate optimist.



BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

ROBERT MEACHEM ▸ WR

Meachem has nowhere to go but up after basically "redshirting" his rookie season. He still has the speed, size and talent that made him a first-round pick out of Tennessee, but a knee injury doomed his chances last summer. He'll battle Devery Henderson to be the third receiver in one of the most enticing training-camp competitions.

INSIDE THE HEADSET

SEAN PAYTON

The Saints have lived and died by Payton's aggressiveness and creativity over the past two years. His versatile playbook and creative use of tailbacks Reggie Bush and Deuce McAllister led them to the NFC title game in 2006. But last year the offense struggled with some of the basics, especially in the running game.

OFFSEASON MOVES

ADDITIONS:

DE **Bobby McCray** *(FA/Jaguars)*, LB **Jonathan Vilma** *(trade/Jets)*, LB **Dan Morgan** *(FA/Panthers)*, QB **Mark Brunell** *(FA/Redskins)*, G **Matt Lehr** *(FA/Buccaneers)*, DB **Aaron Glenn** *(FA/Jaguars)*

SUBTRACTIONS:

K **Olindo Mare** *(FA/Dolphins)*, TE **Eric Johnson** *(FA)*, CB **Fred Thomas** *(FA)*, QB **Jamie Martin** *(FA)*, C **Jeff Faine** *(FA/Buccaneers)*, DE **Renaldo Wynn** *(FA)*, DB **Jay Bellamy** *(FA)*, TE **Billy Miller** *(FA)*, LB **Matt McCoy** *(FA/Buccaneers)*, DT **Brian Young** *(FA)*, LB **Brian Simmons** *(FA)*, DB **Randall Gay** *(FA/Patriots)*

When asked if he expects to be back in the playoffs, he responds with a look of disbelief.

"What do you think?" Brees asks. "Absolutely. There's no doubt. Any expectation less than that, you might as well leave the building right now."

OFFENSE

As long as Brees is healthy and in his prime, the Saints are bona fide contenders. And he has plenty of weapons around him. The biggest question marks are Bush and fellow tailback Deuce McAllister. Can McAllister return to form after his second major knee injury? And can Bush deliver on the promise he showed during his rookie season?

Maximizing Bush's potential will be the No. 1 priority for coach Sean Payton and offensive coordinator Doug Marrone, as the Saints have one of the league's most creative and versatile playbooks.

Quarterbacks Take away the first four games from last season, and Brees would have been an MVP contender again. Like everyone else on the team, he got off to a rough start while New Orleans fell into an 0-4 hole. But over the last 12 games, Brees threw for 3,494 yards, 27 touchdowns and nine interceptions.

The 29-year-old quarterback has done more to transform the Saints than anyone since arriving as a free agent in 2006. He is a born leader, and probably the closest player in the NFL to Peyton Manning when it comes to being a coach on the field. Brees has a great relationship with Payton and a lot of input in the play-calling. He makes terrific reads and quick decisions, even when he's out of the pocket, proving that an undersized quarterback can thrive in the NFL. And for the first time in four years, Brees didn't have to rehab an injury in the offseason. He's in his prime heading into his third season with the Saints.

Although Brees hasn't missed a start in the last two years, New Orleans decided to upgrade his insurance policy by signing veteran backup Mark Brunell in free agency. Brunell, 37, fell to third on the Washington Redskins' depth chart last year and isn't a big-time playmaker anymore. But he has the intelligence and experience that Payton values. Brunell sees the field well and makes sound decisions. Second-year pro Tyler Palko, an undrafted free agent in 2007, could battle for the backup job if he clearly establishes himself ahead of this year's undrafted rookie, T.C. Ostrander. **GRADE: A**

Running backs The duo of Bush and McAllister still has the potential to be the league's best one-two punch, but both have a lot to prove this year.

Bush struggled during his sophomore season, even before he missed the final four games with a partially torn posterior cruciate ligament in his left knee that did not require surgery. Defenses did a better job of locating and corralling the explosive athlete—a job that became even easier when Bush supplanted McAllister as the featured tailback.

If the Saints had it to do over again, they probably would have replaced McAllister with a different back and kept Bush in his versatile role, where he lines up both in the backfield and at several different receiver positions. Bush is a unique talent who clearly has the potential to become a game-breaker. Remember, he scored nine touchdowns over the final seven games of his rookie season, including the playoffs. Plus, he is more determined this year after being humbled by last season's struggles. Bush spent the majority of the offseason in New Orleans rather than returning home to California as he did last year.

McAllister is 29 years old and coming off his second ACL tear in the last three years. He bounced back strong from the first one, but this time his recovery has been complicated by having to undergo an additional microfracture procedure to clean up the older injury.

If McAllister can come back and contribute 15 or more carries a game, the Saints' offense will be as versatile as ever. If not, New Orleans can still

5-YEAR WINS TREND

NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	361.3	4
RUSHING	91.6	28
PASSING	269.6	3
SCORING	379	12t
PUNT RETURNS	8.2	23
KICK RETURNS	21.3	26
RED ZONE TD %	72.0	1
TOTAL DEFENSE	348.1	26
AGAINST RUSH	102.9	13
AGAINST PASS	245.3	30
POINTS ALLOWED	388	25
INTERCEPTIONS	13	28
SACKS	32	19t
TURNOVER DIFF.	-7	22t

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		
QB	Drew Brees	Mark Brunell
FB	Mike Karney	Kevin Dudley
RB	Reggie Bush	Deuce McAllister
WR	David Patten	Devery Henderson
WR	Marques Colston	Robert Meachem
TE	Eric Johnson	Billy Miller
LT	Jammal Brown	Zach Strief
LG	Jamar Nesbit	Andy Alleman
C	Jonathan Goodwin	Matt Lehr
RG	Jahri Evans	Carl Nicks
RT	Jon Stinchcomb	Jermon Bushrod
DEFENSE		
LE	Charles Grant	Bobby McCray
DT	Sedrick Ellis	Brian Young
DT	Hollis Thomas	Kendrick Clancy
RE	Will Smith	Josh Savage
SLB	Scott Fujita	Troy Evans
MLB	Jonathan Vilma	Mark Simoneau
WLB	Scott Shanle	Dan Morgan
LCB	Mike McKenzie	Jason Craft
RCB	Randall Gay	Jason David
FS	Josh Bullocks	Chris Reis
SS	Roman Harper	Kevin Kaesviharn
SPECIALISTS		
K	Martin Gramatica	
P	Steve Weatherford	
KR	Pierre Thomas	
PR	Lance Moore	
LS	Kevin Houser	

FANTASY SPIN

http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football

COLSTON BUSH MOORE

The additions of Randall Gay and Jonathan Vilma give the Saints one of the most formidable defenses in the division. Consider it a sleeper for fantasy points this year.

$ BUY Marques Colston, WR

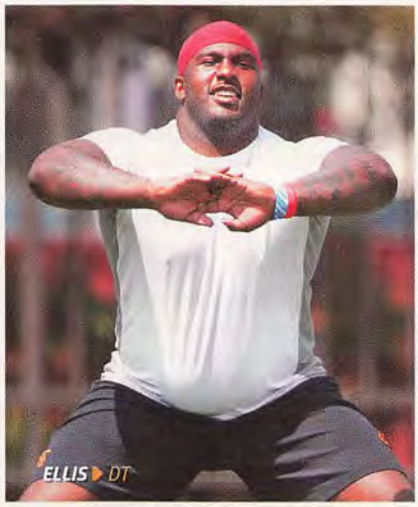
SELL Reggie Bush, RB

Z SLEEPER Lance Moore, WR

HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL

DRAFT REPORT GRADE ▸ C-

While first-round pick **Sedrick Ellis** is not a tall defensive lineman, he can fly all over the field and make a ton of tackles. He will be a consistently disruptive interior force who shoots gaps and disrupts plays in the backfield against both the run and pass. New Orleans then seemed to reach in the second round with CB **Tracy Porter**, who underperformed at times while at Indiana and allowed way too many easy catches. In the fifth round, the Saints grabbed two very talented players who struggled to produce up to their talent level in DT **DeMario Pressley** and OT **Carl Nicks**. Both have the size, athleticism and strength to be starters at their positions, but they need to greatly improve their technique, intensity and passion in order to live up to their potential. After a tough year dealing with Olindo Mare's kicking woes, the Saints most likely solved that problem by grabbing Wisconsin's **Taylor Mehlhaff**, who has a strong leg and was consistent in college. New Orleans took a gamble in the seventh round on Michigan WR **Adrian Arrington**, who is probably more of a fourth-round talent but slid down draft boards due to off-field concerns.


ELLIS ▸ DT

BEN LIEBENBERG / GETTY IMAGES

2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
1	7	Ellis, Sedrick	DT	6-2	305	USC
2	9	Porter, Tracy	CB	5-11	185	Indiana
5	9	Pressley, DeMario	DT	6-3	295	N.C. State
5	29	Nicks, Carl	T	6-5	341	Nebraska
6	12	Mehlhaff, Taylor	K	5-11	184	Wisconsin
7	30	Arrington, Adrian	WR	6-3	203	Michigan

turn to veteran backup Aaron Stecker and second-year surprise Pierre Thomas, both of whom showed great promise in their turns as the featured back last December. Fullback Mike Karney is one of the most reliable blocking backs in the game. **GRADE: B**

Receivers Colston should have made his Pro Bowl debut last year, but the Saints' slow start kept him flying under the radar. He finished with 98 catches for 1,202 yards and 11 touchdowns in his second NFL season. At 6-4 and 231 pounds, Colston is a big, physical target and a go-to guy in the red zone. He also has the speed to break some big plays. But Colston's best feature is his hands. He routinely makes the tough catches—high, low or across his body.

Veteran David Patten emerged as the perfect complement to Colston last year after signing as a free agent. Though he recently turned 34, Patten still has enough speed, quickness and toughness to cause problems for defenses.

The Saints considered upgrading their tight end group, flirting with an offseason trade for Jeremy Shockey. Eric Johnson is eager to prove he can bring more value as a receiver in his second year with the Saints. Mark Campbell is a solid blocker who can catch some passes, while Billy Miller is reliable in both areas. **GRADE: B**

Offensive line After fielding the same starting five for the last two years, the Saints need to prove they can carry on without center Jeff Faine, who signed a monster deal with Tampa Bay in free agency. New Orleans let him go in part because the team felt good about backup Jonathan Goodwin, who will now shift to the starting job. The other starters are all back. Left tackle Jammal Brown was a Pro Bowler two years ago, and he's a great athlete for his size. Right guard Jahri Evans emerged as one of the best young

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE *(an opponent breaks down the Saints)*

"They're going to be really explosive on offense. Drew Brees is obviously the catalyst there and he does a great job of getting the ball out to his players. The fact that they were able to bring back Eric Johnson and Devery Henderson was big, and with Reggie Bush, Aaron Stecker and Marques Colston all coming back, they've got a lot of pieces that will allow them to be very productive on that side of the ball. If they get Deuce McAllister back as well, that's going to give them another weapon.

"Losing their center may hurt, but they obviously feel they can turn to (Jonathan) Goodwin and still run their system. I don't know if they have a big weakness on the offensive side of the ball, and on defense they've been real aggressive, adding a pass rusher like Bobby McCray, a corner like Randall Gay. I just don't see a real weakness anywhere. ...

"The only thing that happened last year was they got caught up in it out of the gate (starting the season 0-4) and fell into such a hole. It's hard to get out of a hole like that, so there's no reason to believe they won't be right back in the hunt. ... "

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1	Tampa Bay	SEPT. 7	1:00	W / L — SCORE
WEEK 2	@ Washington	SEPT. 14	1:00	W / L — SCORE
WEEK 3	@ Denver	SEPT. 21	4:05	W / L — SCORE
WEEK 4	San Francisco	SEPT. 28	1:00	W / L — SCORE
WEEK 5	Minnesota	OCT. 6	8:30	W / L — SCORE
WEEK 6	Oakland	OCT. 12	1:00	W / L — SCORE
WEEK 7	@ Carolina	OCT. 19	1:00	W / L — SCORE
WEEK 8	San Diego *(in London)*	OCT. 26	1:00	W / L — SCORE
WEEK 9	*OPEN DATE*			
WEEK 10	@ Atlanta	NOV. 9	1:00	W / L — SCORE
WEEK 11	@ Kansas City	NOV. 16	1:00	W / L — SCORE
WEEK 12	Green Bay	NOV. 24	8:30	W / L — SCORE
WEEK 13	@ Tampa Bay	NOV. 30	1:00	W / L — SCORE
WEEK 14	Atlanta	DEC. 7	1:00	W / L — SCORE
WEEK 15	@ Chicago	DEC. 11	8:15	W / L — SCORE
WEEK 16	@ Detroit	DEC. 21	1:00	W / L — SCORE
WEEK 17	Carolina	DEC. 28	1:00	W / L — SCORE

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

players at his position during his second NFL season. Right tackle Jon Stinchcomb and left guard Jamar Nesbit are intelligent, quality linemen who are effective as run and pass blockers. This group underachieved last year. They struggled to establish a consistent running game, especially in short-yardage situations, but they don't give up many sacks. **GRADE: B-**

DEFENSE

The Saints' front office attacked this offseason with an aggressive but narrow-minded focus—to get more athletic, dynamic and disruptive on defense. They traded for middle linebacker Jonathan Vilma on the eve of free agency and later signed defensive end Bobby McCray, cornerback Randall Gay and linebacker Dan Morgan. New Orleans kept going in the draft, trading up in the first round to land defensive tackle Sedrick Ellis and using its top three picks on defense.

With that kind of talent upgrade, the Saints can't help but improve. But defensive coordinator Gary Gibbs, who runs a conventional 4-3 scheme, still has a tough task on his hands. New Orleans needs to get more consistent pressure on quarterbacks, force more turnovers and stop giving up so many deep touchdown passes.

Defensive line Defensive ends Will Smith and Charles Grant are supposed to be the strength of this defense, but they weren't nearly as effective as expected in 2007. Grant, in particular, had a rough year, especially after he suffered an ankle injury in midseason.

The offseason reinforcements should have a big impact, though, freeing up Smith and Grant to do more damage. Smith is an every-down end who brings strength and power against both the run and the pass. Grant uses a bit more finesse and athleticism, but he is also effective in both roles. McCray is a pass-rushing specialist who will rotate in with Smith and Grant and give the Saints an added dimension on passing downs. New Orleans could even use all three on the field at the same time, moving Grant inside. Ellis will also give the Saints an inside-outside rush. The 6-2, 305-pound rookie is aggressive and athletic for his size, and he should make the Saints much more disruptive in the middle.

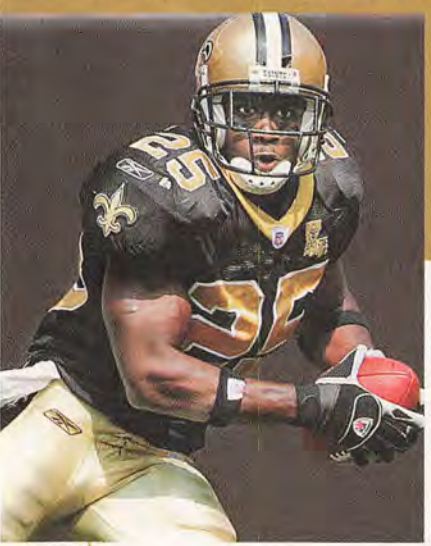
Ellis is versatile enough to line up alongside run-stuffing veteran Hollis Thomas or three-technique tackle Brian Young. The rotation should help all three of them stay fresh. The Saints also have experienced veteran backups in Kendrick Clancy and Antwan Lake. **GRADE: B**

Linebackers This group has the potential to become much better, especially if Vilma can recover from a knee surgery that ended his season last October. When healthy, the 6-1, 230-pound player is the kind of active, aggressive playmaker the Saints have been missing since the days of Sam Mills and the Dome Patrol.

Vilma, just entering his prime at 26 years old, is thrilled to be back in a 4-3 defense, where he thrived in his first two seasons with the New York Jets before they switched to a 3-4. If he recovers from his injury, Vilma could be as important to the defense as Brees was to the offense when he first arrived.

THE BOOK ON ... REGGIE BUSH *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"You've got to love his versatility. He's a threat as a runner, pass catcher and return man, and he's dynamic. When he touches the ball, there's a sense of electricity in the building because you know he can do something special with it. He blends excellent vision with great maneuverability and anticipation, and he's very slippery. He's pretty tough for a guy his size. He'll fight for that extra yard. I just don't know how durable he can be. You'd rather have him running outside for you because he's going to take a beating running inside, which could limit him. He's not an exceptional blocker, either. He gets outmatched there sometimes, but he'll stick his head in there and give you an effort."



SAINTS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1 Rickey Jackson *(1981-93)*

Had double-digit sack totals six times and averaged 9.5 per season for the Saints. His 29 career fumble recoveries rank third all-time for a non-quarterback.

2 Sam Mills *(1986-94)*

Made four Pro Bowls with the Saints after coming over with coach Jim Mora from the USFL.

3 Vaughan Johnson *(1986-93)*

Formed the feared Dome Patrol with Jackson, Mills and Pat Swilling. All were named to the Pro Bowl in 1992, which made it four straight for Johnson.

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/06	L	10-41	at Indianapolis Colts
09/16	L	14-31	at Tampa Bay Buccaneers
09/24	L	14-31	Tennessee Titans
10/07	L	13-16	Carolina Panthers
10/14	W	28-17	at Seattle Seahawks
10/21	W	22-16	Atlanta Falcons
10/28	W	31-10	at San Francisco 49ers
11/04	W	41-24	Jacksonville Jaguars
11/11	L	29-37	St. Louis Rams
11/18	L	10-23	at Houston Texans
11/25	W	31-6	at Carolina Panthers
12/02	L	23-27	Tampa Bay Buccaneers
12/10	W	34-14	at Atlanta Falcons
12/16	W	31-24	Arizona Cardinals
12/23	L	23-38	Philadelphia Eagles
12/30	L	25-33	at Chicago Bears

WON 7, LOST 9

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Bush	157	581	3.7	22	4
Stecker	115	448	3.9	26	5
Thomas	52	252	4.8	24t	1
McAllister	24	92	3.8	15	0
Brees	23	52	2.3	9	1
Henderson	2	20	10.0	15	0
Karney	11	17	1.5	10	2
Moore	2	7	3.5	7t	1
Weatherford	1	5	5.0	5	0
Martin	3	-3	-1.0	-1	0
Patten	2	-5	-2.5	1	0
SAINTS	392	1466	3.7	26	14
OPPONENTS	408	1646	4.0	43	7

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Colston	98	1202	12.3	45	11
Bush	73	417	5.7	25	2
Patten	54	792	14.7	58	3
Johnson	48	378	7.9	22	2
Stecker	36	211	5.9	26	0
Moore	32	302	9.4	22	2
Miller	27	328	12.1	57	2
Henderson	20	409	20.5	54	3
Thomas	17	151	8.9	17	1
Copper	15	126	8.4	21	2
Karney	13	78	6.0	11	0
McAllister	4	15	3.8	7	0
Brees	2	10	5.0	8	0
Owens	1	4	4.0	4	0
SAINTS	440	4423	10.1	58	28
OPPONENTS	327	4122	12.6	80t	32

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Brees	652	440	4423	28	18
SAINTS	652	440	4423	28	18
OPPONENTS	524	327	4122	32	13

SACKS SAINTS 32, OPPONENTS 16

Smith 7, Harper 4, Wynn 3.5, Fujita 3, Thomas 3, Young 3, Grant 2.5, Simoneau 2, Bullocks 1, Lake 1, Simmons 1, Clancy 0.5, Cooper 0.5

JAY DROWNS / SN

Strongside linebacker Scott Fujita is one of the Saints' most reliable veterans, both as a leader and a playmaker. He is a sure tackler who hits with power. Morgan is an intriguing option at weakside linebacker. His career has been decimated by an Achilles' tendon injury and a series of concussions. But in his prime, he was a tackling machine with Carolina. He'll compete for a starting job with solid veteran Scott Shanle, who has been a starter for the last two years. Veteran Mark Simoneau, who started the last two seasons at middle linebacker, also remains in the fold and can help out in the middle or on the weak side. **GRADE: C+**

Secondary » As the last line of defense, the Saints' secondary probably got more flak than it deserved for giving up so many deep touchdown passes last year. But then again, there was plenty of blame to go around. The Saints added three new cornerbacks, signing free agents Gay and Aaron Glenn, then drafting Tracy Porter in the second round. They hope the depth and competition will improve play across the board. More importantly, New Orleans needs the new beefed-up pass rush to keep quarterbacks from sitting back and picking them apart.

Veteran cornerback Mike McKenzie is the Saints' most reliable cover man, but he suffered a season-ending knee injury last December. At 32, it remains to be seen if he can return with the same speed and mobility.

Gay served primarily as a nickel back in New England and isn't an athletic marvel. But he is intelligent and versatile enough to fill in wherever needed and should be a reliable option as a starter or nickel back. He'll compete for the starting job with Jason David, who had a disastrous performance last year after signing as an unrestricted free agent from Indianapolis. David struggled to adjust from the Colts' cover-2 system to the Saints' package, which uses a lot more man coverage. He's still young and talented enough to bounce back after a full year in the system, though. The safeties weren't much better in 2007, but the Saints have a decent mix with young talents Roman Harper and Josh Bullocks and veteran Kevin Kaesviharn. **GRADE: C-**

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Saints have used four different kickers over the last two years, and this year they drafted rookie Taylor Mehlhaff to compete with veteran Martin Gramatica. A nice surprise at the end of last year, Gramatica made all five of his field-goal attempts after being signed in December. This battle could go either way. Third-year punter Steve Weatherford has been solid, though he had a forgettable season finale in Chicago, letting one of his kicks turn into a Devin Hester touchdown. The Saints, meanwhile, didn't return any kicks or punts for touchdowns last year. Bush will be used more often on punt returns, and Porter could also work his way into the mix. **GRADE: C**

BOTTOM LINE

The Saints' schedule might be the team's biggest hurdle. Since they are "hosting" this year's international game in London, they will spend nine weeks on the road. Still, they should be considered the front-runners in the NFC South. New Orleans has one of the top five offenses in the NFL and its defense can't help but improve after an offseason makeover. And big-time seasons look to be in store for Bush and Vilma.

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FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT

UP

ROSTER

#	QUARTERBACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
9	Brees, Drew	QB	6-0	209	01/15/1979	7	Purdue
11	Brunell, Mark	QB	6-1	217	09/17/1970	13	Washington
6	Ostrander, T.C.	QB	6-3	215	01/04/1985	0	Stanford
3	Palko, Tyler	QB	6-1	215	08/09/1983	1	Pittsburgh

#	OFFENSIVE LINE	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
65	Alleman, Andy	G	6-4	302	11/20/1983	0	Akron
70	Brown, Jammal	T	6-6	313	03/30/1981	3	Oklahoma
74	Bushrod, Jermon	T	6-5	315	08/19/1984	1	Towson
75	Duckworth, Tim	G	6-4	318	09/14/1982	0	Auburn
73	Evans, Jahri	G	6-4	318	08/22/1983	2	Bloomsburg
76	Goodwin, Jonathan	C	6-3	318	12/02/1978	6	Michigan
47	Houser, Kevin	C	6-2	252	08/23/1977	8	Ohio State
68	Lehr, Matt	G	6-2	304	04/25/1979	7	Virginia Tech
67	Nesbit, Jamar	G	6-4	328	12/17/1976	9	South Carolina
78	Stinchcomb, Jon	T	6-5	315	08/27/1979	4	Georgia
64	Strief, Zach	T	6-7	349	09/22/1983	2	Northwestern

#	RUNNING BACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
24	Barclay, Chris	RB	5-10	180	10/15/1983	1	Wake Forest
25	Bush, Reggie	RB	6-0	203	03/02/1985	2	USC
40	Dudley, Kevin	RB	6-0	238	01/02/1982	2	Michigan
44	Karney, Mike	RB	5-11	258	07/06/1981	4	Arizona State
26	McAllister, Deuce	RB	6-1	232	12/27/1978	7	Mississippi
27	Stecker, Aaron	RB	5-10	213	11/13/1975	8	Western Illinois
23	Thomas, Pierre	RB	5-11	210	12/18/1984	1	Illinois

#	RECEIVERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
80	Campbell, Mark	TE	6-6	260	12/06/1975	7	Michigan
12	Colston, Marques	WR	6-4	231	06/05/1983	2	Hofstra
18	Copper, Terrance	WR	6-0	207	03/12/1982	4	East Carolina
85	Ghent, Ronnie	TE	6-2	253	01/05/1980	1	Louisville
10	Green, Skyler	WR	5-9	191	09/12/1984	2	LSU
19	Henderson, Devery	WR	5-11	200	03/26/1982	4	LSU
82	Johnson, Eric	TE	6-3	252	09/15/1979	5	Yale
17	Meachem, Robert	WR	6-0	215	09/28/1984	0	Tennessee
83	Miller, Billy	TE	6-3	253	04/24/1977	8	USC
16	Moore, Lance	WR	5-9	190	08/31/1983	2	Toledo
86	Ortega, Buck	TE	6-4	250	11/22/1981	0	Miami (FL)
81	Patten, David	WR	5-10	190	08/19/1974	11	Western Carolina
84	Ryan, Titus	WR	6-0	193	05/19/1984	1	Concordia College

#	DEFENSIVE LINE	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
71	Clancy, Kendrick	DT	6-1	305	08/17/1978	8	Mississippi
94	Grant, Charles	DE	6-3	290	09/03/1978	6	Georgia
92	Harris, Orien	DT	6-3	300	06/03/1983	1	Miami (FL)
96	Lake, Antwan	DT	6-4	308	07/10/1979	5	West Virginia
93	McCray, Bobby	DE	6-6	261	08/08/1981	4	Florida
95	Savage, Josh	DE	6-4	276	09/28/1980	4	Utah
91	Smith, Will	DE	6-3	282	07/04/1981	4	Ohio State
99	Thomas, Hollis	DT	6-0	306	01/10/1974	11	Northern Illinois
66	Young, Brian	DT	6-2	298	07/08/1977	8	UTEP

#	DEFENSIVE BACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
29	Bullocks, Josh	S	6-1	207	02/28/1983	3	Nebraska
21	Craft, Jason	CB	5-10	187	02/13/1976	9	Colorado State
42	David, Jason	CB	5-8	180	06/12/1982	4	Washington State
22	Fassitt, Greg	CB	5-11	186	04/20/1985	0	Grambling State
20	Gay, Randall	CB	5-11	190	05/05/1982	4	LSU
31	Glenn, Aaron	CB	5-9	183	07/16/1972	14	Texas A&M
41	Harper, Roman	S	6-1	200	12/11/1982	2	Alabama
43	Kaesviharn, Kevin	S	6-1	196	08/29/1976	7	Augustana (SD)
34	McKenzie, Mike	CB	6-0	194	04/26/1976	9	Memphis
36	Phillips, Anwar	CB	6-0	187	10/25/1982	0	Penn State
39	Reis, Chris	S	6-1	215	09/19/1983	1	Georgia Tech
28	Young, Usama	CB	6-0	194	05/08/1985	1	Kent State

#	LINEBACKERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
54	Evans, Troy	LB	6-3	238	12/03/1977	6	Cincinnati
55	Fujita, Scott	LB	6-5	250	04/28/1979	6	California
50	Mitchell, Marvin	LB	6-3	249	10/21/1984	1	Tennessee
52	Morgan, Dan	LB	6-2	245	12/19/1978	7	Miami (FL)
58	Shanle, Scott	LB	6-2	245	11/23/1979	5	Nebraska
53	Simoneau, Mark	LB	6-0	245	01/16/1977	8	Kansas State
51	Vilma, Jonathan	LB	6-1	230	04/16/1982	4	Miami (FL)

#	KICKERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
1	Gramatica, Martin	K	5-8	175	11/27/1975	8	Kansas State
7	Weatherford, Steve	P	6-3	215	12/17/1982	2	Illinois

▶ **SEAN PAYTON,** *Head coach*

Doug Marrone, off. coord./off. line; **Gary Gibbs**, def. coord.; **Joe Vitt**, asst. head coach/linebackers; **Greg McMahon**, special teams coord.; **Dennis Allen**, secondary; **Pete Carmichael Jr.**, quarterbacks/passing game; **Curtis Johnson**, wide receivers; **Travis Jones**, asst. def. line; **Aaron Kromer**, running backs; **Mike Mallory**, asst. special teams; **Terry Malone**, tight ends; **Tony Oden**, asst. secondary; **Ed Orgeron**, def. line

NEW YORK GIANTS

Now in the spotlight, will Giants sorely miss their underdog role?

By Paul Schwartz, *New York Post*

Last season, there did not seem to be any way the Giants could knock off the Buccaneers, Cowboys and Packers in the playoffs and then complete their highly improbable march to glory by upsetting the previously unbeaten Patriots in Super Bowl XLII. But they did, and the Giants of 2008 can no longer dress themselves in underdog clothing.

Led by Super Bowl MVP Eli Manning and a ferocious pass rush, the Giants showed how an adequate regular season could blossom into something special in the playoffs. With virtually the entire offensive unit returning intact and the vast majority of the key defensive players back on the scene, the Giants have the goods to be a contender once again, especially if Manning has finally turned the corner after a brilliant closing run.

Coach Tom Coughlin's job security is no longer an issue, as he's signed through the 2011 season, and the return of defensive

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE

(an opponent breaks down the Giants)

"I like the physical-ness of that team. What I like is their pass rush. When people think about a pass rush, they think about a guy running around past somebody. If you're a good defensive-line coach, you play those guys six or eight inches off the line and you let 'em get momentum. That's something called 'kinetic energy.' That's why Justin Tuck is wild in the middle—he's got all that kinetic energy built up. As a ballclub, they are a physical team, not a finesse team. I like that. Sooner or later, you have to face the music. The Giants can face the music. They can take you straight up. ...

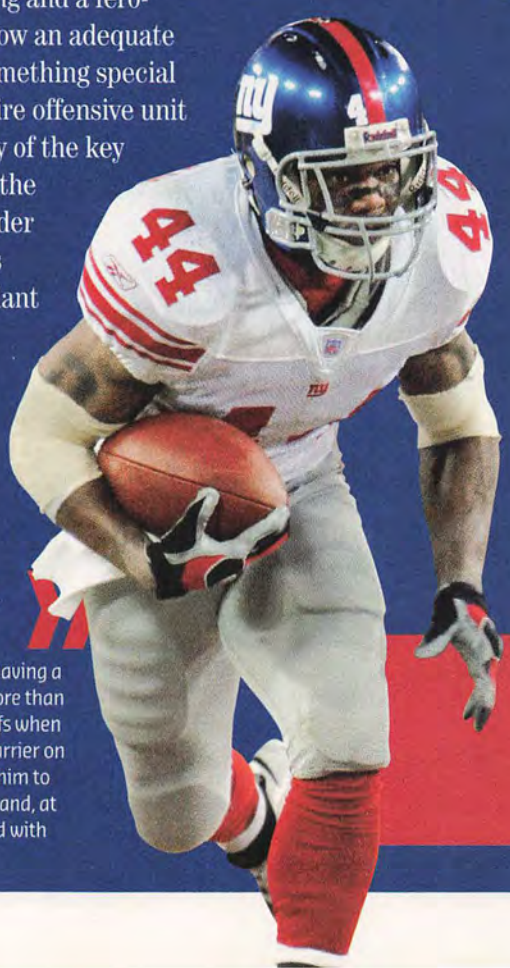
"Eli (Manning) is improved. Would I say Eli is a great quarterback? I don't know if he's a great quarterback yet, but the last half of the season you can't argue with what he did. One thing I always kept in the back of my mind is that the team never gave up on him. They never said, 'We're not sure about him.' Every one of those guys said, 'It's our fault.' That told me something about Eli's character. The fact that his team never gave him up to the press told me a lot. ...

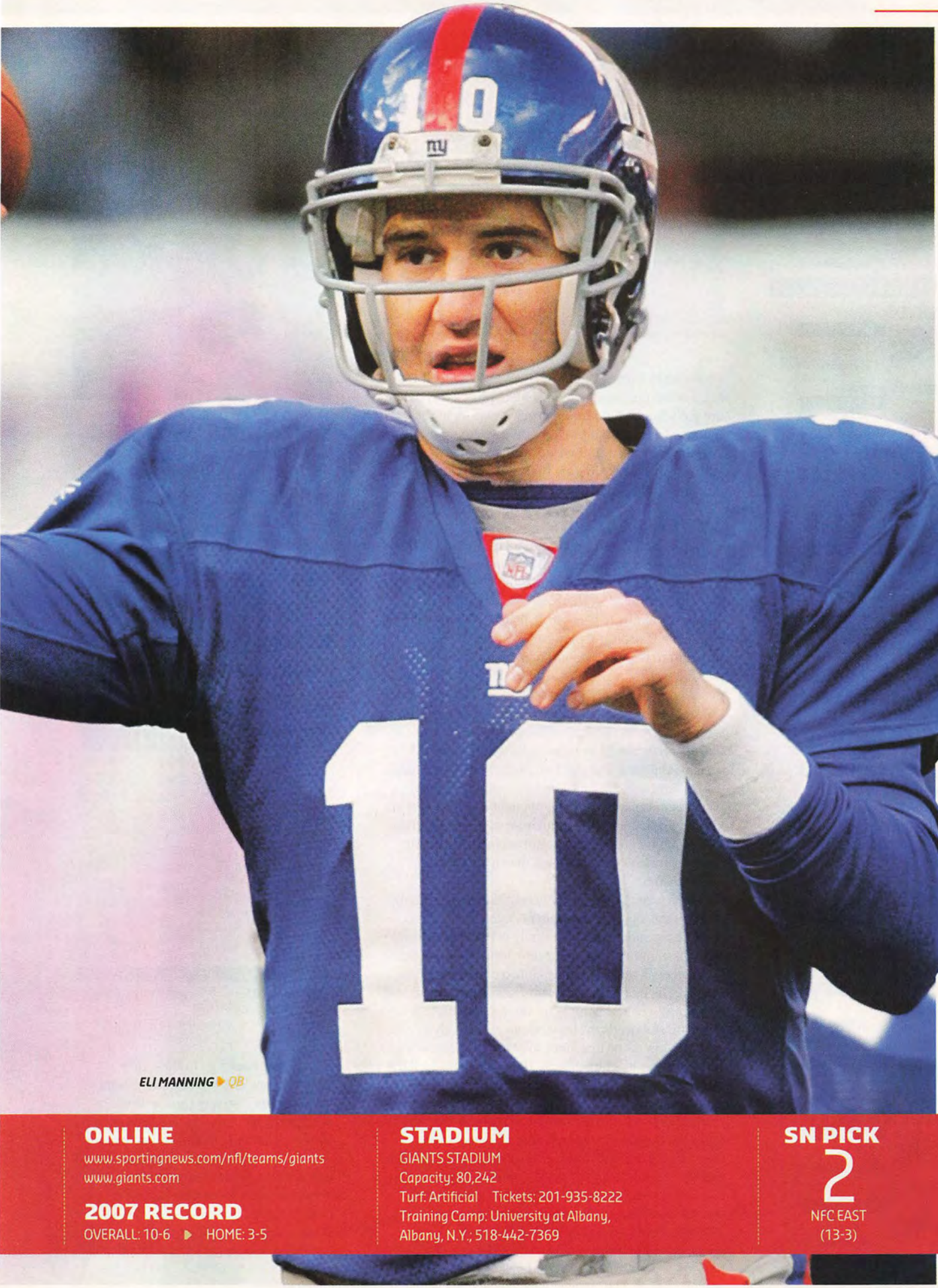
"I don't think it's a particularly talented secondary, but they did play well when they had to play well. ... "

BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

AHMAD BRADSHAW ▸ RB

As a seventh-round draft pick, Bradshaw was having a typical rookie season—watching and learning more than playing—until the late stages and into the playoffs when he emerged as perhaps the most complete ball-carrier on the roster. His talent and elusiveness could allow him to challenge for a starting spot in his second season and, at the very least, he'll share much of the rushing load with Brandon Jacobs.





ELI MANNING ▶ QB

ONLINE

www.sportingnews.com/nfl/teams/giants
www.giants.com

2007 RECORD

OVERALL: 10-6 ▶ HOME: 3-5

STADIUM

GIANTS STADIUM
Capacity: 80,242
Turf: Artificial Tickets: 201-935-8222
Training Camp: University at Albany,
Albany, N.Y.; 518-442-7369

SN PICK

2
NFC EAST
(13-3)

OPPOSITE: ALBERT DICKSON, BOB LEVERONE / SN

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 Washington
SEPT. 4 | 7:00
— SCORE

WEEK 2 @ St. Louis
SEPT. 14 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 3 Cincinnati
SEPT. 21 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 4 *OPEN DATE*

WEEK 5 Seattle
OCT. 5 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 6 @ Cleveland
OCT. 13 | 8:30
— SCORE

WEEK 7 San Francisco
OCT. 19 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 8 @ Pittsburgh
OCT. 26 | 4:15
— SCORE

WEEK 9 Dallas
NOV. 2 | 4:15
— SCORE

WEEK 10 @ Philadelphia
NOV. 9 | 8:15
— SCORE

WEEK 11 Baltimore
NOV. 16 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 12 @ Arizona
NOV. 23 | 4:15
— SCORE

WEEK 13 @ Washington
NOV. 30 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 14 Philadelphia
DEC. 7 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 15 @ Dallas
DEC. 14 | 8:15
— SCORE

WEEK 16 Carolina
DEC. 21 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 17 @ Minnesota
DEC. 28 | 1:00
— SCORE

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

THE BOOK ON ... PLAXICO BURRESS *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"I thought Plaxico Burress grew up a lot (last season). I'd seen him under stress in Pittsburgh and saw him react in a poor way in the AFC Championship Game. He played hurt and became very dependable (in 2007). I know a year ago there was some frustration in him not always being right in his routes, sometimes making mental errors. With no practice time, he was able to improve that, and Eli (Manning) and he were able to make their timing work. He's pretty beat up. He's got a lot of nagging injuries. He's a big target and people take shots at him. As long as Coughlin can be the way he was last year (by giving him days off), it'll work, because he's not going to last much longer if they don't do that for him. He's going to have a bull's-eye on him. Guys that weigh 300 pounds realized that if we take this guy out it's pretty easy to figure out what to do about the rest of the team. As long as he's threatening on the slant or vertical, you've got a problem that requires more than one person."

coordinator Steve Spagnuolo—an emerging NFL head-coaching prospect—is a huge plus. The Giants are well-stocked at almost every position, but it remains to be seen if the chip-on-the-shoulder attitude they used to their advantage last year can be cultivated once again now that they've been fitted for championship rings.

OFFENSE

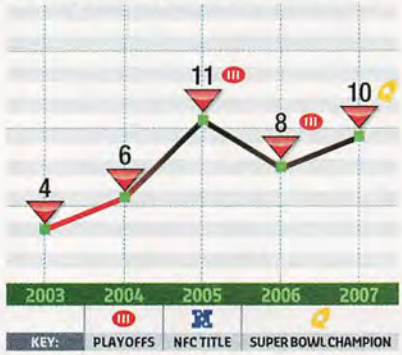
The stunning improvement and remarkable consistency shown by Manning during the postseason run has the Giants believing their franchise quarterback has finally arrived. If that's the case, the offensive attack should truly flourish. This is a balanced attack, with coordinator and play-caller Kevin Gilbride unafraid to rely on a pounding running game to set up the play-action passes favored in this system. Time of possession is usually high for the Giants, but Gilbride doesn't mind taking chances downfield, especially with wide receiver Plaxico Burress.

Quarterbacks » For the majority of the 2007 season, Manning was just bumping along, frustrating Giants fans, coaches and the front office with his inconsistent play. Suddenly, the light came on and in his last five games—the regular-season finale and the four stunning postseason performances—Manning was the franchise quarterback the Giants always hoped he'd be.

Did he turn the corner for good? Manning certainly grew on the job, outplaying Jeff Garcia, Tony Romo, Brett Favre and finally Tom Brady in the Super Bowl run. His confidence is on the rise, he is entering his physical peak and has unquestioned command of the offense. His work ethic and laid-back demeanor should serve him well in handling all the recent success. Manning still needs to show he can be a steady performer over the long haul, improve his accuracy and cut down on his interceptions. He may never reach the high statistical level of the league leaders, but the Giants need more than a 70-something rating out of him.

Former No. 1 pick David Carr was signed to add talent for the backup spot, and the Giants believe they can tap at least some of the potential he has had trouble showing during his disappointing career. Carr knows he comes in having no chance to start, but he's looking for a place to jump-start his football life. The drafting of Andre' Woodson (Kentucky) in the sixth round likely signals the end of the road for Jared Lorenzen and Anthony Wright in New York. **GRADE: B+**

5-YEAR WINS TREND



NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	331.4	16
RUSHING	134.3	4
PASSING	197.1	21
SCORING	373	14
PUNT RETURNS	7.4	27
KICK RETURNS	23.9	7
RED ZONE TD %	54.5	12t
TOTAL DEFENSE	305.0	7
AGAINST RUSH	97.7	8
AGAINST PASS	207.3	11
POINTS ALLOWED	351	17
INTERCEPTIONS	15	20t
SACKS	53	1
TURNOVER DIFF.	-9	26

Running backs » In their first year without Tiki Barber, the Giants put together a strong (and at times dominant) backfield by committee, led by the bulldozing Brandon Jacobs and rookie Ahmad Bradshaw, who provided a spark late in the season. This is a legitimate thunder-and-lightning combo. In his first year as a starter, Jacobs averaged five yards per attempt but had a problem with injuries that kept him off the field. At 264 pounds,

BOB LEVERONE / SN

Jacobs is a load and cannot be brought down by one defender, but he runs upright and takes as much punishment as he dishes out. Bradshaw was a force down the stretch and especially in the postseason. His combination of speed, power and elusiveness will surely lead to greater opportunities this season.

The front office came up with a steal in the signing of fullback Madison Hedgecock off waivers. He earned a long-term extension and is the powerful blocker needed in the offense. In reserve at halfback, the Giants re-signed Derrick Ward, who filled in admirably early in the season when Jacobs went down with a knee injury. **GRADE: B+**

Receivers » Despite playing all season with a severely sprained ankle, Burress was often able to dominate opposing defensive backs, primarily by using his height advantage and physical style. Burress was unable to practice virtually all season and at times that rust showed in games. But he was still able to be productive (70 catches, 1,025 yards, 12 TDs) and, after dominating Green Bay's Al Harris in the NFC title game, caught the game-winning TD in the Super Bowl.

In his 12th season with the Giants, Amani Toomer continued to be a steady player, evolving into more of a possession target. His drops increased, though, and he may have to stave off a challenge for his starting job from Steve Smith. During an injury-marred rookie campaign, Smith finally showed the skills late in the season that made him a primary threat in college at USC, and he is expected to command additional playing time in 2008.

A return to health from tight end Jeremy Shockey (broken leg, ankle surgery) is essential. Despite the contributions of rookie Kevin Boss, the production at tight end went down once Shockey went out. Despite rumors that the Giants were looking to trade Shockey, he remains a big part of their plans, and his role as a blocker in the running game is a big asset.

There is a lack of a true speed receiver on the roster, as Sinorice Moss has yet to develop in two pro seasons. Drafting Mario Manningham (Michigan) in the third round may add a deep-ball presence. Unless there's a change in plans, Super Bowl hero David Tyree's role in the offense appears to be minimal. **GRADE: B+**

Offensive line » This unit is high on lunch-pail mentality and low on ego. There are no Pro Bowlers in the lineup, but this tough, smart, cohesive group works extremely well together. It's anchored by center Shaun O'Hara, who sets the emotional tone. The top player, though, is right guard Chris Snee, who is able to pull in the running game and use his strength and tenacity as a pass blocker. Versatile and incredibly

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

	OFFENSE	
QB	Eli Manning	David Carr
FB	Madison Hedgecock	Robert Douglas
RB	Brandon Jacobs	Ahmad Bradshaw
WR	Amani Toomer	Steve Smith
WR	Plaxico Burress	Mario Manningham
TE	Jeremy Shockey	Kevin Boss
LT	David Diehl	Guy Whimper
LG	Rich Seubert	Kevin Boothe
C	Shaun O'Hara	Grey Ruegamer
RG	Chris Snee	Kevin Boothe
RT	Kareem McKenzie	Adam Koets

	DEFENSE	
LE	Michael Strahan	Dave Tollefson
DT	Barry Cofield	Rodney Leisle
DT	Fred Robbins	Jay Alford
RE	Osi Umenyiora	Justin Tuck
SLB	Mathias Kiwanuka	Zak DeOssie
MLB	Antonio Pierce	Chase Blackburn
WLB	Gerris Wilkinson	Danny Clark
LCB	Aaron Ross	Kevin Dockery
RCB	Corey Webster	Sam Madison
SS	Sammy Knight	Michael Johnson
FS	James Butler	Kenny Phillips

	SPECIALISTS
K	Lawrence Tynes
P	Jeff Feagles
KR	Domenik Hixon
PR	R.W. McQuarters
LS	Zak DeOssie

DAVID DUROCHIK / SPORTPICS

GIANTS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1 Lawrence Taylor *(1981-93)*
A first-team All-Pro choice eight times; he could not be blocked by one man.

2 Sam Huff *(1956-63)*
Five-time Pro Bowler was the centerpiece of championship Giants defenses.

3 Harry Carson *(1976-88)*
Nine-time Pro Bowler and recent Hall-of-Fame addition was a fourth-round draft pick.

» DRAFT REPORT GRADE ▸ B+

Even though their defense shined against New England in the Super Bowl, the Giants still needed an upgrade at safety. Grabbing the top one in the draft, **Kenny Phillips**, should allow them to replace Gibril Wilson. Phillips brings the athleticism to be very good in pass coverage and the toughness and strength to be a force in run support. After hitting a home run with CB Aaron Ross in last year's draft, the Giants got a corner in the second round to eventually start opposite him in USC's **Terrell Thomas**. Thomas is a big, physical cornerback who fits the Giants' defensive scheme very well. **Mario Manningham** would have been a first-round pick without his off-field concerns, but he was worth the gamble late in the third round. If he develops, Manningham will be the replacement for Amani Toomer when he retires. Manningham is more talented than New York's current No. 3 wideout, Steve Smith. **Bryan Kehl** is a technically sound linebacker who is more athletic and productive than you would expect and should challenge for playing time in 2009. **Jonathan Goff** is a tough and instinctive inside 'backer who is consistently around the ball between the tackles and should be a good backup. Quarterback **André Woodson** is a great late-round gamble because he has size, athleticism, arm strength and intangibles that are hard to find. If his mechanics and technique can be greatly improved, he could become a quality starter. **Robert Henderson** is a typical late-round Giants defensive end in that he is a very well built, athletic and an excellent developmental prospect worth taking a chance on.

» 2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
1	31	Phillips, Kenny	S	6-2	210	Miami (FL)
2	32	Thomas, Terrell	CB	6-1	200	USC
3	32	Manningham, Mario	WR	6-0	178	Michigan
4	30	Goff, Jonathan	LB	6-2	245	Vanderbilt
5	24	Kehl, Bryan	LB	6-2	242	Brigham Young
6	32	Woodson, André	QB	6-5	224	Kentucky
6	33	Henderson, Robert	DE	6-3	283	Southern Miss

PHILLIPS ▸ S

ROSTER

#	QUARTERBACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
8	Carr, David	QB	6-3	216	07/21/1979	6	Fresno State
13	Lorenzen, Jared	QB	6-4	285	02/14/1981	2	Kentucky
10	Manning, Eli	QB	6-4	225	01/03/1981	4	Mississippi
2	Wright, Anthony	QB	6-1	211	02/14/1976	6	South Carolina

#	OFFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
77	Boothe, Kevin	G	6-5	315	07/05/1983	2	Cornell
66	Diehl, David	G	6-5	319	09/15/1980	5	Illinois
70	Goddard, Na'Shan	G	6-5	315	04/23/1983	0	South Carolina
61	Koets, Adam	T	6-5	300	01/07/1984	0	Oregon State
67	McKenzie, Kareem	T	6-6	327	05/24/1979	7	Penn State
60	O'Hara, Shaun	C	6-3	303	06/23/1977	8	Rutgers
65	Ruegamer, Grey	G	6-4	299	06/11/1976	8	Arizona State
69	Seubert, Rich	G	6-3	310	03/30/1979	6	Western Illinois
76	Snee, Chris	G	6-3	317	01/18/1982	4	Boston College
78	Torrey, Brandon	G/T	6-4	295	05/18/1983	0	Howard
79	Whimper, Guy	T	6-5	302	05/21/1983	2	East Carolina

#	RUNNING BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
44	Bradshaw, Ahmad	RB	5-9	198	03/19/1986	1	Marshall
24	Douglas, Robert	RB	6-1	230	07/25/1982	1	Memphis
22	Droughns, Reuben	RB	5-11	220	08/21/1978	7	Oregon
36	Harris, Kay-Jay	RB	6-0	240	03/27/1979	1	West Virginia
39	Hedgecock, Madison	RB	6-3	266	08/27/1981	3	North Carolina
27	Jacobs, Brandon	RB	6-4	264	07/06/1982	3	Southern Illinois
34	Ward, Derrick	RB	5-11	228	08/30/1980	4	Ottawa
28	Ware, Danny	RB	6-0	234	02/18/1985	1	Georgia

#	RECEIVERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
89	Boss, Kevin	TE	6-6	253	01/11/1984	1	Western Oregon
17	Burress, Plaxico	WR	6-5	232	08/12/1977	8	Michigan State
86	Collins, Jerome	TE	6-4	267	08/18/1982	1	Notre Dame
87	Hixon, Domenik	WR	6-2	192	10/08/1984	1	Akron
15	Jennings, Michael	WR	5-11	181	09/07/1979	1	Florida State
84	Johnson, Darcy	TE	6-5	252	02/11/1983	1	UCF
19	London, Brandon	WR	6-4	210	10/16/1984	0	Massachusetts
3	Lowber, Todd	WR	6-3	205	01/26/1982	0	Ramapo
88	Matthews, Michael	TE	6-4	270	10/09/1983	1	Georgia Tech
83	Moss, Sinorice	WR	5-8	185	12/28/1983	2	Miami (FL)
80	Shockey, Jeremy	TE	6-5	251	08/18/1980	6	Miami (FL)
12	Smith, Steve	WR	5-11	197	05/06/1985	1	USC
81	Toomer, Amani	WR	6-3	203	09/08/1974	12	Michigan
85	Tyree, David	WR	6-0	206	01/03/1980	5	Syracuse

#	DEFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
93	Alford, Jay	DT	6-3	304	05/28/1983	1	Penn State
94	Bell, Marcus	DT	6-2	325	06/01/1979	6	Memphis
96	Cofield, Barry	DT	6-4	306	03/19/1984	2	Northwestern
74	Leisle, Rodney	DT	6-3	315	02/05/1981	3	UCLA
98	Robbins, Fred	DT	6-4	317	03/25/1977	8	Wake Forest
92	Strahan, Michael	DE	6-5	255	11/21/1971	15	Texas Southern
71	Tollefson, Dave	DE	6-4	263	05/19/1981	1	Northwest Missouri St.
91	Tuck, Justin	DE	6-5	274	03/29/1983	3	Notre Dame
72	Umenyiora, Osi	DE	6-3	261	11/16/1981	5	Troy

#	DEFENSIVE BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
45	Barnett, Darren	CB	5-11	185	05/22/1984	0	Missouri State
33	Bell, Jason	CB	6-0	196	04/01/1978	6	UCLA
37	Butler, James	S	6-3	215	09/07/1982	3	Georgia Tech
35	Dockery, Kevin	CB	5-8	188	01/08/1984	2	Mississippi State
20	Johnson, Michael	S	6-2	211	05/09/1984	1	Arizona
26	Knight, Sammy	S	6-1	215	09/10/1975	11	USC
29	Madison, Sam	CB	5-11	180	04/23/1974	11	Louisville
25	McQuarters, R.W.	CB	5-10	194	12/21/1976	10	Oklahoma State
33	Pope, Geoffrey	CB	6-0	186	06/21/1984	0	Howard
31	Ross, Aaron	CB	6-0	193	09/15/1982	1	Texas
	Shanle, Andrew	S	6-1	210	03/09/1983	0	Nebraska
23	Webster, Corey	CB	6-0	202	03/02/1982	3	LSU

#	LINEBACKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
57	Blackburn, Chase	LB	6-3	247	06/10/1983	3	Akron
55	Clark, Danny	LB	6-2	245	05/09/1977	8	Illinois
52	Daniels, Tank	LB	6-3	248	12/27/1981	2	Harding
51	DeOssie, Zak	LB	6-4	250	05/24/1984	1	Brown
48	Johnson, Rory	LB	6-0	237	03/15/1986	0	Mississippi
97	Kiwanuka, Mathias	LB	6-5	265	03/08/1983	2	Boston College
54	O'Neil, Keith	LB	6-0	240	08/26/1980	4	Northern Arizona
58	Pierce, Antonio	LB	6-1	238	10/26/1978	7	Arizona
59	Wilkinson, Gerris	LB	6-3	231	04/05/1983	2	Georgia Tech

#	KICKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
18	Feagles, Jeff	P	6-1	215	03/07/1966	20	Miami (FL)
9	Tynes, Lawrence	K	6-1	202	06/03/1978	4	Troy

TOM COUGHLIN, *Head coach*

Kevin Gilbride, off. coord.; **Steve Spagnuolo**, def. coord.; **Dave DeGuglielmo**, asst. off. line; **Pat Flaherty**, off. line; **Jerald Ingram**, running backs; **Mike Pope**, tight ends; **Mike Sullivan**, wide receivers; **Chris Palmer**, quarterbacks; **Peter Giunta**, secondary/corners; **David Merritt**, secondary/safeties; **Bill Sheridan**, linebackers; **Mike Waufle**, def. line; **Tom Quinn**, special teams coord.

durable David Diehl moved to left tackle last season and, while the team still believes he's more of a natural guard, he was solid protecting Manning's blind side. Diehl's rare ability to play every snap in every game makes him a valuable commodity, as does his ability to play each position on the line except center.

The line's grit comes in large part from left guard Rich Seubert, who has overcome a gruesome leg injury to move back into the starting lineup. At right tackle, studious Kareem McKenzie uses brute force in his run blocks. **GRADE: A-**

DEFENSE

In his first season as a coordinator, Spagnuolo put his stamp on the Giants' defense and the results, after a slow start, were impressive. Spagnuolo is a strong communicator who wants to apply intense pressure up front and is unafraid to bring heat from anywhere. The scheme is predicated on stopping the run and getting to the quarterback, which at times places stress on the cornerbacks. Unlike most NFL teams, there's a plethora of defensive ends with pass-rush skills, which sets everything in motion.

Defensive line Few teams can match the firepower the Giants possess at defensive end, where Osi Umenyiora, Michael Strahan and Justin Tuck form a dangerous trio that's equally lethal at rushing the quarterback and stopping the run.

Tuck, an emerging force who starred in the Super Bowl, would start for any other team, but he's the first man off the sideline, at times lining up inside to give opposing defenses a different look.

Umenyiora has led the Giants in sacks the past three seasons and has perhaps the quickest first step in the game. He learned at the feet of Strahan, the career franchise leader, who in his 15th season with the Giants put together another quality campaign in 2007. In the final stages of his Hall-of-Fame career, Strahan is the team's emotional leader, and his tenacity against the run is exemplary.

At tackle, Fred Robbins and Barry Cofield are strong run-stoppers. Robbins has some pass-rush prowess, while Cofield mostly sticks to the dirty work of stopping the run. In his rookie season, Jay Alford showed enough to warrant increased time in the tackle rotation this year.

The Giants led the NFL in sacks last year, mainly because of the work of their defensive ends, as they were often able to apply pressure without the aid of multiple blitzes, leaning on the physical superiority of Umenyiora, Strahan and Tuck. **GRADE: A+**

Linebackers What at first appeared to be a problem area in 2007 was helped greatly by

OFFSEASON MOVES

ADDITIONS:

DB **Sammy Knight** *(FA/Jaguars)*, QB **David Carr** *(FA/Panthers)*, LB **Danny Clark** *(FA/Texans)*

SUBTRACTIONS:

DT **William Joseph** *(FA/Raiders)*, LB **Kawika Mitchell** *(FA/Bills)*, DB **Gibril Wilson** *(FA/Raiders)*, DE **Adrian Awasom** *(FA)*, DE **Reggie Torbor** *(FA/Dolphins)*, DT **Russell Davis** *(FA)*, DT **Manuel Wright** *(FA)*

INSIDE THE HEADSET

TOM COUGHLIN

Coughlin is viewed as a conservative individual, but he does not coach that way. He has great faith in Eli Manning and is unafraid to put the ball in Manning's hands in an offense that can hardly be characterized as low-risk. Coughlin continues to enforce many rules and run a tight ship, but has clearly softened his stance on many issues and is more compassionate.

HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL

FANTASY SPIN

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BURRESS SHOCKEY SMITH

With a Super Bowl victory now on his resume, expect Eli Manning to be drafted as a top-10 quarterback. Still, note his 20 INTs from last season.

$ BUY Plaxico Burress, WR

SELL Jeremy Shockey, TE

Z SLEEPER Steve Smith, WR

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/09	L	35-45	at Dallas Cowboys
09/16	L	13-35	Green Bay Packers
09/23	W	24-17	at Washington Redskins
09/30	W	16-3	Philadelphia Eagles
10/07	W	35-24	New York Jets
10/15	W	31-10	at Atlanta Falcons
10/21	W	33-15	San Francisco 49ers
10/28	W	13-10	at Miami Dolphins
11/11	L	20-31	Dallas Cowboys
11/18	W	16-10	at Detroit Lions
11/25	L	17-41	Minnesota Vikings
12/02	W	21-16	at Chicago Bears
12/09	W	16-13	at Philadelphia Eagles
12/16	L	10-22	Washington Redskins
12/23	W	38-21	at Buffalo Bills
12/29	L	35-38	New England Patriots

WON 10, LOST 6

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Jacobs	202	1009	5.0	43t	4
Ward	125	602	4.8	44	3
Droughns	85	275	3.2	45	6
Bradshaw	23	190	8.3	88t	1
Manning	29	69	2.4	18	1
Shockey	1	6	6.0	6	0
Moss	1	4	4.0	4	0
Lorenzen	1	2	2.0	2	0
Wright	1	-1	-1.0	-1	0
Hixon	1	-8	-8.0	-8	0
GIANTS	**469**	**2148**	**4.6**	**88t**	**15**
OPPONENTS	408	1563	3.8	67t	12

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Burress	70	1025	14.6	60t	12
Toomer	59	760	12.9	40	3
Shockey	57	619	10.9	29	3
Ward	26	179	6.9	17	1
Jacobs	23	174	7.6	34	2
Moss	21	225	10.7	20	0
Boss	9	118	13.1	23	2
Smith	8	63	7.9	12	0
Droughns	7	49	7.0	11	0
Hedgecock	6	45	7.5	9	0
Matthews	6	28	4.7	6	0
Tyree	4	35	8.8	24	0
Mix	3	39	13.0	21	0
Bradshaw	2	12	6.0	11	0
Hixon	1	5	5.0	5	0
GIANTS	**302**	**3376**	**11.2**	**60t**	**23**
OPPONENTS	306	3666	12.0	65t	24

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Manning	529	297	3336	23	20
Lorenzen	8	4	28	0	0
Wright	7	1	12	0	0
GIANTS	**544**	**302**	**3376**	**23**	**20**
OPPONENTS	523	306	3666	24	15

SACKS GIANTS 53, OPPONENTS 28

Umenyiora 13, Tuck 10, Strahan 9, Robbins 5.5, Kiwanuka 4.5, Mitchell 3.5, Ross 1.5, Alford 1, Cofield 1, Madison 1, Pierce 1, Torbor 1

HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL

the addition of Kawika Mitchell at weakside linebacker and the slow but steady progress by converted defensive end Mathias Kiwanuka on the strong side. Kiwanuka missed the second half of the season after breaking his leg, however, and Mitchell signed with the Bills. The Giants were fortunate that middle linebacker Antonio Pierce was healthy and had a strong season as the defensive signal-caller. Pierce is not a dominating player, but he is smart, alert and a prime reason why the Giants were so difficult to run on last season. The return to health of Kiwanuka is essential, as he was developing into a rangy pass-rushing specialist with a huge wingspan. On the weak side, the competition for a starting spot will feature third-year pro Gerris Wilkinson and newcomer Danny Clark. This could potentially be a weak spot if fourth-round pick Bryan Kehl of BYU turns out to be a nonfactor. **GRADE: B-**

Secondary This unit was widely viewed as an Achilles' heel last season. Despite some rough patches, however, the defensive backfield held up and improved greatly during the postseason run, standing up to Garcia, Romo, Favre and Brady. The addition of cornerback Aaron Ross was immense, as the first-round pick quickly found his way into the starting lineup and added stability. Veteran corner Sam Madison held up reasonably well, relying on smarts to make up for diminished physical skills. Benched because of his poor play, corner Corey Webster made sudden and dramatic improvement and, by season's end, was making game-changing plays and giving the Giants hope he can live up to his second-round draft status.

The loss in free agency of Gibril Wilson hurts, as he was the team's top safety. As a result, veteran Sammy Knight was signed with the hopes that he's got one more quality year left. The move to take free safety Kenny Phillips (Miami) in the first round of the draft was sparked by Wilson's departure, and Phillips is expected to compete for a starting job. Young safeties James Butler and Michael Johnson have excellent size, though they are questionable in terms of coverage and range. Kevin Dockery has been a solid nickel back but has trouble staying on the field and out of the trainers' room. He'll be pushed by second-round pick Terrell Thomas of USC. **GRADE: B-**

SPECIAL TEAMS

The return for a 21st NFL season by punter Jeff Feagles provides the Giants with a well-worn security blanket, as Feagles in many ways leads this entire unit. He's an expert holder for field goals and a calming presence for placekicker Lawrence Tynes in addition to being one of the best directional punters in the league.

In his first season in New York, Tynes had some ups and downs en route to hitting 23 of 27 field goals during the regular season. After two harrowing misses in the NFC title game, he nailed the longest postseason field goal in Lambeau Field history when his 47-yarder in OT sent the Giants to the Super Bowl.

Tyree remains a force as a gunner on coverage teams, and backup linebacker Chase Blackburn is also a big factor in coverage. The signing off waivers of Domenik Hixon immediately energized the kickoff-return game. Hixon gave the Giants a breakaway threat, as did Bradshaw. The punt-return game with R.W. McQuarters was nothing special, but he did provide ball security. **GRADE: B**

BOTTOM LINE

The Giants of 2007 thrived amid low expectations and embraced the underdog role every step of the way. Their shocking run to victory in the Super Bowl was a classic case of a good—but not great—team coming together at the right time. Things figure to be quite different in 2008, with the Giants suddenly being the hunted instead of the hunter. If the Manning that was so captivating last postseason is the real deal, this franchise is in fine shape; but if he does not take a quantum leap forward, things could get sticky. There's the desired blend of age and youth on the roster, plus plenty of pass rushers. On offense, though, there isn't a gamebreaker, unless Burress fully recovers from ankle and knee problems. This team and coaching staff operated with an edge all of last season, but now Coughlin has job security and the players have been fitted for championship rings. There's enough ability on hand for another playoff appearance, but attitude more than anything else should tell the tale.

90

FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT: **UP**

SN PICK
3
NFC EAST
(7-9)

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2007 RECORD
OVERALL: 8-8 ▶ HOME: 3-5

(L TO R): DAVID DUROCHIK FOR SN; PAUL SPINELLI / GETTY IMAGES; HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL

PHILADELPHIA EAGLES

Even with needed defensive upgrade, McNabb's health still holds the key

By Geoff Mosher, *Wilmington (Del.) News-Journal*

Two words define this year's objective: Super Bowl. The Eagles are gearing up for another championship run, their first legitimate one since 2004 and maybe the final one of quarterback Donovan McNabb's Philadelphia career.

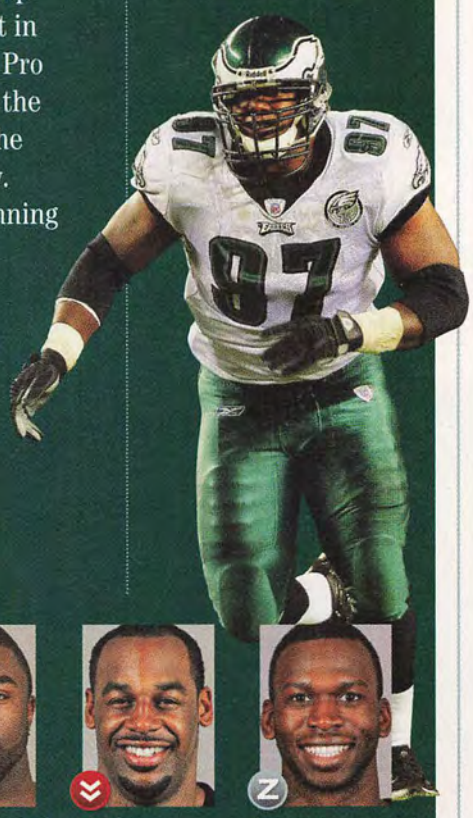
That intention was made clear on the first day of free agency, when the club signed All-Pro cornerback Asante Samuel, widely regarded as the top talent on the market. The Eagles also brought in pass-rushing specialist Chris Clemons to join Pro Bowl right defensive end Trent Cole and give the team another weapon to "throw fastballs at the quarterback," as coach Andy Reid likes to say.

The offense will again center on All-Pro running back Brian Westbrook, whose transformation from blossoming talent to superstar is complete. With McNabb and Westbrook, the Eagles have a tandem of multidimensional weapons to carry the offense. Question is: Are they enough?

BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

BRODRICK BUNKLEY ▸ DT

After a disappointing rookie season, Bunkley took a gigantic step forward his sophomore year and appears primed for a big 2008. The former 19th overall pick out of Florida State helped the club shore up its run defense and showed signs of generating a solid pass rush from the interior with three sacks.



FANTASY SPIN

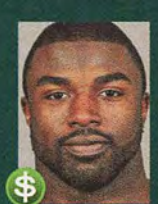
http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football

Kevin Curtis eclipsed 1,000 yards receiving for the first time last season. Next on his improvement list is scoring more than the six TDs he had in 2007.

$ BUY »
Brian Westbrook, RB

SELL »
Donovan McNabb, QB

Z SLEEPER »
Reggie Brown, WR


WESTBROOK

McNABB

BROWN

To make the leap from last season's 8-8 mark to Super Bowl contender, the Eagles must improve in three critical areas: red-zone offense, turnover creation and explosiveness in the return game. If they fix those problems, the Eagles can contend with anyone. But if not, it'll be another year of Super Bowl drought in Philadelphia.

OFFENSE

The club's variation of the West Coast offense is predicated on creating mismatches in the passing game, starting with the versatile Westbrook, one of the NFL's most electrifying weapons and top pass-catching halfbacks. The matchup problems Westbrook creates against linebackers and defensive backs afford Reid and offensive coordinator Marty Mornhinweg flexibility and creativity within the offense. Philadelphia's offense is designed to throw at a 65-percent clip, with McNabb's scrambling ability an X-factor under an intense pass rush.

Quarterbacks » McNabb, a five-time Pro Bowler, needs a bounce-back season to keep his job. His return from reconstructive knee surgery in 2007 yielded mixed results. The elusiveness and mobility that helped elevate McNabb to elite quarterback status gradually returned, and while his completion percentage (61.5) and passer rating (89.9) last season were above his career averages, the offense encountered peaks and valleys. McNabb connected on fewer deep passes and struggled to hook up with receivers inside the red zone, as the Eagles scored less than 20 points 10 times last season.

Injuries have kept McNabb, 31, from playing more than 14 games in a season since 2004, which is why this is probably a make-or-break year for him. Looking over McNabb's shoulder is Kevin Kolb, the team's second-round pick in 2007 who's waiting for his chance to take the reins.

Kolb, a record-setting quarterback at the University of Houston, is viewed as the franchise's future cornerstone if McNabb's play slips. Kolb's rookie season was geared toward development and serving as an understudy to McNabb and veteran backup A.J. Feeley. But the training wheels come off in July, as Kolb will be ready to push Feeley for the No. 2 job at training camp. **GRADE: B**

DRAFT REPORT GRADE ▸ C

The Eagles have drafted two defensive tackles in recent years, so their selection of Notre Dame's **Trevor Laws** in the second round was a surprise; especially because he is a short and athletic defensive tackle with many of the same traits as current Eagles DT Mike Patterson. Laws is a good player who can fill a role and will be a part of the line rotation early in his career. With a strong need for a dynamic returner and big-play receiver, the Eagles took a gamble on California's **DeSean Jackson**, who fell to the second round because of questions about his weight and off-field issues. Jackson has the talent to be an explosive playmaker as a return man and slot receiver. McNeese State DE/OLB **Bryan Smith** is a very athletic defender whose role with the Eagles has yet to be determined. He could be an undersized end or converted to outside linebacker. If he remains at end, he has a lot of the same athletic traits and pass-rush skills that Trent Cole possessed when he came into the league. Pittsburgh's **Michael McGlynn,** who played right tackle in college but will likely move to guard in the NFL, has the toughness, competitive spirit and strength to develop into a quality starter. Safety **Quintin Demps** is a player who flashes very good talent, but way too often he does not play aggressively and is an inconsistent tackler. The Eagles took two big gambles with fourth-round CB **Jack Ikegwuonu** and seventh-round OT **King Dunlap**. Ikegwuonu would have been a first-rounder had he not blown out his knee while working out just after declaring early for the draft. He is unlikely to contribute much in 2008 but should become a starter by 2009 or 2010. Dunlap entered the 2007 campaign vying with Jake Long to be the best senior tackle in the country, but he had a poor final campaign and was benched in favor of a true freshman during the season. He slid way down the draft board, but may prove to be worth the gamble.

2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
2	16	Laws, Trevor	DT	6-1	295	Notre Dame
2	18	Jackson, DeSean	WR	6-0	166	California
3	17	Smith, Bryan	LB	6-3	217	McNeese State
4	10	McGlynn, Mike	T	6-5	315	Pittsburgh
4	18	Demps, Quintin	S	6-1	215	UTEP
4	32	Ikegwuonu, Jack	CB	5-11	194	Wisconsin
6	18	Gibson, Mike	T	6-5	290	California
6	34	Mays, Joe	LB	5-11	245	North Dakota St.
6	37	Studebaker, Andy	LB	6-3	251	Wheaton (IL)
7	23	Dunlap, King	T	6-9	310	Auburn

5-YEAR WINS TREND

THE BOOK ON ... BRIAN WESTBROOK *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"Scary, scary. He is one of the best in the league. He presents a lot of different problems because he is not just a running back, he is a wideout. He fits in pass-protection-wise. But I have a great deal of respect for him as a blocker from just watching the tapes.

"When you are talking about the emphasis of the guy that you want 22 eyes on, every play, it's the same thing. He's the guy that, I think, makes it go.

"Brian is a Pro Bowl player. In watching them, I developed a deeper appreciation for how good of a pass blocker he is. Everybody thinks about Brian mostly as a runner and receiver, and what he does with the ball. But he is tough. He is not one of those small backs that (only) blocks down low."

DAVID DUROCHIK FOR SN

NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	358.1	6
RUSHING	123.4	8
PASSING	234.7	10
SCORING	336	17
PUNT RETURNS	8.1	24
KICK RETURNS	21.7	24
RED ZONE TD %	45.1	24
TOTAL DEFENSE	311.4	10
AGAINST RUSH	95.8	7
AGAINST PASS	215.6	18
POINTS ALLOWED	300	9
INTERCEPTIONS	11	30t
SACKS	37	9t
TURNOVER DIFF.	-8	25

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE *(an opponent breaks down the Eagles)*

"When you go into a game plan, you have to say, 'OK, we can't allow Donovan (McNabb) and (Brian) Westbrook to get off. These are the two guys we must stop.' ... Their whole team wasn't healthy last season because L.J. (Smith) wasn't completely healthy last year. He's a talented tight end. ...

"For the most part, earlier in his career, (McNabb) would tuck and run. Now, he'll run around to give himself some time to allow his receivers to get open, somewhat like (Pittsburgh's Ben) Roethlisberger. Roethlisberger, he'll tuck it if he has to, but he pretty much wants to run around just to give his receivers some time to get open if they aren't initially getting open. Donovan does the same thing. You have to understand when you're defending their receivers, you might have to defend a little longer. ...

"They just have to add a few things in. I think they'll be back to where they were. Overall, they're always going to be a team that you have to be ready for, because they have skilled guys. I know they had a few changes on defense, going to a more aggressive-type defense."

Running backs » Westbrook followed up a career season in 2006 with an even better one in '07. He ranked third in the NFL in rushing (1,333 yards), set a single-season team record with 90 receptions and led the league with a franchise-record 2,104 yards from scrimmage. Always an injury concern, Westbrook battled knee inflammation but managed to play 15 games for the second straight year. His touches are usually limited to 25 or fewer per game, emphasizing the need for quality depth.

The Eagles made a draft-day trade with Miami and picked up second-year pro Lorenzo Booker. A poor man's Westbrook, Booker also specializes in catching passes out of the backfield, and Reid believes he can add another dimension to Philadelphia's wide-open offense.

Correll Buckhalter has fought through three season-ending knee surgeries in his first five seasons to carve his niche as Westbrook's primary backup. The injuries have reduced Buckhalter to a power, between-the-tackles runner, but they haven't stopped him from being effective. He averaged five yards per carry last season, a career best. Fullback is one of the team's few training-camp battles. Jason Davis, a third-year pro who spent all of last year on the practice squad after being injured his entire rookie season, will be pushed by free-agent acquisition Dan Klecko, the former Patriots and Colts defensive tackle who is hoping to resurrect his career on the opposite side of scrimmage. **GRADE: A-**

Receivers » The club tried hard in the offseason to pair McNabb with a top-flight target but failed to lure Randy Moss or trade for Larry Fitzgerald. Now, the team will rely on the substance-over-style tandem of Kevin Curtis and Reggie Brown.

Curtis set a personal best in receptions (77) and receiving yards (1,110) last season, his first with the Eagles, and became the franchise's first receiver to surpass the 1,000-yard receiving mark since Terrell Owens in 2004. Brown was supposed to have a breakout third year but struggled to develop a rhythm with McNabb and came on too late. Even with a career-high 61 receptions, Brown's receiving yards and touchdown catches dropped off from 2006.

Brown tends to disappear for stretches and rarely seems in sync with McNabb. Curtis is fast and sure-handed but isn't the physical presence the team needs to better its red-zone production. DeSean Jackson, the electrifying punt returner from California and Philadelphia's second-round pick in this year's draft, is the dark horse of the bunch. He brings an element of speed the Eagles desperately need in the return game and can help the offense stretch the field if he masters the playbook in time.

Tight end L.J. Smith, the team's designated franchise player, was limited last year due to multiple injuries, but the club expects him to be fully healthy this season and present an effective weapon in the middle of the field and inside the red zone. **GRADE: C+**

Offensive line » The right side is the team's bedrock. Veteran right tackle Jon Runyan fought through numerous bumps and bruises last

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

	OFFENSE	
QB	Donovan McNabb	Kevin Kolb
FB	Jason Davis	Dan Klecko
RB	Brian Westbrook	Correll Buckhalter
WR	Kevin Curtis	DeSean Jackson
WR	Reggie Brown	Jason Avant
TE	L.J. Smith	Kris Wilson
LT	Tra Thomas	Winston Justice
LG	Todd Herremans	Scott Young
C	Jamaal Jackson	Nick Cole
RG	Shawn Andrews	Max Jean-Gilles
RT	Jon Runyan	Winston Justice

	DEFENSE	
LE	Juqua Parker	Victor Abiamiri
LT	Mike Patterson	Trevor Laws
RT	Brodrick Bunkley	Montae Reagor
RE	Trent Cole	Chris Clemons
SLB	Chris Gocong	Pago Togafau
MLB	Stewart Bradley	Rocky Boiman
WLB	Omar Gaither	Akeem Jordan
LCB	Asante Samuel	Tanard Davis
SS	Quintin Mikell	Sean Considine
FS	Brian Dawkins	J.R. Reed
RCB	Sheldon Brown	Joselio Hanson

	SPECIALISTS	
K	David Akers	
P	Sav Rocca	
KR	DeSean Jackson	
PR	DeSean Jackson	
LS	Jon Dorenbos	

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1	St. Louis	SEPT. 7	1:00
WEEK 2	@ Dallas	SEPT. 15	8:30
WEEK 3	Pittsburgh	SEPT. 21	4:15
WEEK 4	@ Chicago	SEPT. 28	8:15
WEEK 5	Washington	OCT. 5	1:00
WEEK 6	@ San Francisco	OCT. 12	4:15
» WEEK 7	OPEN DATE		
WEEK 8	Atlanta	OCT. 26	1:00
WEEK 9	@ Seattle	NOV. 2	4:15
WEEK 10	New York Giants	NOV. 9	8:15
WEEK 11	@ Cincinnati	NOV. 16	1:00
WEEK 12	@ Baltimore	NOV. 23	1:00
WEEK 13	Arizona	NOV. 27	8:15
WEEK 14	@ New York Giants	DEC. 7	1:00
WEEK 15	Cleveland	DEC. 15	8:30
WEEK 16	@ Washington	DEC. 21	1:00
WEEK 17	Dallas	DEC. 28	1:00

W — L — SCORE

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

year—including a tailbone fracture—to extend his regular-season streak of games started to 176, the NFL's second-longest active mark. Right guard Shawn Andrews made the Pro Bowl for the second straight year, furthering his ascension into the league's elite interior linemen. Left tackle Tra Thomas remains McNabb's reliable blindside protection, while left guard Todd Herremans and center Jamaal Jackson are both young and promising. Third-year guard Max Jean-Gilles could push Herremans for a starting job in training camp. **GRADE: B-**

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/09	L	13-16	at Green Bay Packers
09/17	L	12-20	Washington Redskins
09/23	W	56-21	Detroit Lions
09/30	L	3-16	at New York Giants
10/14	W	16-9	at New York Jets
10/21	L	16-19	Chicago Bears
10/28	W	23-16	at Minnesota Vikings
11/04	L	17-38	Dallas Cowboys
11/11	W	33-25	at Washington Redskins
11/18	W	17-7	Miami Dolphins
11/25	L	28-31	at New England Patriots
12/02	L	24-28	Seattle Seahawks
12/09	L	13-16	New York Giants
12/16	W	10-6	at Dallas Cowboys
12/23	W	38-23	at New Orleans Saints
12/30	W	17-9	Buffalo Bills

WON 8, LOST 8

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Westbrook	278	1333	4.8	36	7
Buckhalter	62	313	5.0	30t	4
McNabb	50	236	4.7	40	0
Brown	5	36	7.2	12	0
Feeley	7	23	3.3	7	0
Tapeh	5	18	3.6	11	0
Hunt	10	16	1.6	4	1
Avant	1	1	1.0	1	0
Kolb	3	-2	-0.7	0	0
EAGLES	**421**	**1974**	**4.7**	**40**	**12**
OPPONENTS	403	1533	3.8	56	10

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Westbrook	90	771	8.6	57t	5
Curtis	77	1110	14.4	75t	6
Brown	61	780	12.8	45t	4
Avant	23	267	11.6	31	2
Smith	22	236	10.7	26	1
Baskett	16	142	8.9	25	1
Celek	16	178	11.1	29	1
Lewis	13	265	20.4	50	3
Buckhalter	12	87	7.3	14	0
Schobel	11	108	9.8	18	1
Tapeh	8	50	6.3	9	0
Mahe	1	11	11.0	11	0
EAGLES	**350**	**4005**	**11.4**	**75t**	**24**
OPPONENTS	312	3693	11.8	91t	16

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
McNabb	473	291	3324	19	7
Feeley	103	59	681	5	8
Lewis	1	0	0	0	0
EAGLES	**577**	**350**	**4005**	**24**	**15**
OPPONENTS	539	312	3693	16	11

SACKS — **EAGLES 37, OPPONENTS 49**

Cole 12.5, Thomas 5, Patterson 4, Kearse 3.5, Bunkley 3, Bradley 1, Gocong 1, Hanson 1, Howard 1, Mikell 1, Reagor 1, Spikes 1

DEFENSE

Defensive coordinator Jim Johnson emphasizes pressure and turnovers. He wants his unit to attack the quarterback and capitalize on his mistakes. Despite fielding a top-10 defense that ranked among the NFL's best against the run last season, Johnson wasn't pleased with his unit's league-low 19 takeaways and pedestrian 37 sacks. The remedy, he hopes, is the addition of Samuel and Clemons. Both are expected to upgrade a young, fast defense that took a step forward last year.

Defensive line Clemons' arrival gives the club a variety of pass rushers from the edge to carry out Johnson's call for more pressure. Cole, an emerging star, is coming off a 12.5-sack season and his first Pro Bowl appearance. He's the leader of an end rotation that includes the towering Victor Abiamiri; veteran Juqua Parker, who usurped Jevon Kearse for the starting job last season; and Clemons, an oft-injured situational rusher who excelled in Oakland's 3-4 defense but must now adapt to Philadelphia's 4-3 scheme.

The team is banking on the development of Abiamiri, a second-round pick last year who played sparingly during his rookie campaign. At 6-4, he can be disruptive at the line of scrimmage with his strong pass-rush ability and long arms. Abiamiri can also move inside and play tackle in the nickel package.

At defensive tackle, the team is well stocked with two former first-round picks in Mike Patterson and Brodrick Bunkley. The duo comprised one of the NFC's top interior lines last season and helped spearhead a run defense that improved from 26th in 2006 to seventh in '07. They also teamed up for seven sacks, creating pressure from the interior to complement the edges. For more depth, the club used a second-round pick in this year's draft on Trevor Laws, a Patterson clone regarded for his ability to quickly shed blockers and flock to the ball. **GRADE: B+**

OFFSEASON MOVES

ADDITIONS:
DB **Asante Samuel** *(FA/Patriots)*, LB **Chris Clemons** *(FA/Raiders)*, DT **Dan Klecko** *(FA/Colts)*, LB **Rocky Bolman** *(FA/Colts)*, FB **Kris Wilson** *(FA/Chiefs)*, RB **Lorenzo Booker** *(trade/Dolphins)*

SUBTRACTIONS:
DE **Jevon Kearse** *(FA/Titans)*, DB **William James** *(FA/Bills)*, RB **Reno Mahe** *(FA)*, DT **Kimo von Oelhoffen** *(FA)*, RB **Thomas Tapeh** *(FA/Vikings)*, OLB **Takeo Spikes** *(FA)*

Linebackers The defense's youngest unit—by far—is also its most promising. All three starters—Chris Gocong, Omar Gaither and Stewart Bradley—are under age 25. Gaither, the team's leading tackler last season, will slide from the middle to the weak side to replace Takeo Spikes and accommodate Bradley, a second-year pro who excelled on special teams and sparkled in limited snaps at middle linebacker last season. Gocong, a converted defensive end who spent his rookie year on injured reserve, made tremendous strides last season and is still developing the instincts needed on the strong side.

The trio brings stability to a position that has undergone personnel changes year after year for the past decade. Gaither, a 2006 fifth-round pick, is the group's vocal leader and most fundamental tackler, while Bradley and Gocong have tremendous big-play potential. Gocong can also shift back to end and rush the passer from a stand-up or hand-down alignment. The development of Bradley is critical to the unit's chemistry and success. Akeem Jordan, one of the leaders of the special teams last year, and newcomer Rocky Boiman combine to bring speed and depth to the position. **GRADE: B**

Secondary One of the biggest question marks heading into the season revolves around six-time Pro Bowl free safety Brian Dawkins, whose skills have declined and durability has been questioned after missing all of training camp and six games last season due to a variety of injuries. Dawkins, who turns 35 in October and has played all of his 12 NFL seasons with the Eagles, is also entering the final year of his contract. When healthy, he's still an

EAGLES' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1 Chuck Bednarik *(1949-62)*

Known for knocking Frank Gifford out of football for 18 months with one of his signature punishing tackles, "Concrete Charlie," who also played center, was the league's last true 60-minute man.

2 Bill Bergey *(1974-80)*

Recorded more than 1,000 tackles, with four Pro Bowl appearances, in seven years manning the middle of Philadelphia's linebacking corps.

3 Seth Joyner *(1986-93)*

Taken in the eighth round, Joyner was cut in training camp before finally sticking with the Eagles and going on to post career marks of 52 sacks, 24 interceptions and 26 forced fumbles.

INSIDE THE HEADSET

ANDY REID

Reid, an offensive-minded coach who runs a West Coast scheme, prefers to pass at a 65-percent clip but is known to occasionally push that number up to 70 percent. His offense begins with a massive line that specializes in pass protection and a quarterback who spreads the ball around equally among receivers, tight ends and running backs. Reid tinkers with end-arounds and flea-flickers against inferior opponents, but plays it by the book in the playoffs.

above-average free safety, if not an elite one. But if Dawkins continues to battle nagging injuries, it leaves the Eagles without one of their top playmakers.

At strong safety, Quintin Mikell and Sean Considine will battle for the starting job. Considine is coming off his second season-ending shoulder surgery in three years, and his already-shaky reputation took another hit when Mikell replaced him during the season and finished fifth on the defense in tackles. Mikell is more physical and has a knack for being around the ball. He should be the leading candidate for the starting job and can also play free safety if Dawkins goes down.

The club's durability problems at cornerback were addressed with the signing of Samuel, whose 16 interceptions the past two seasons led the NFL. Samuel will start at left corner opposite the reliable Sheldon Brown. **GRADE: B**

SPECIAL TEAMS

If there's a glaring weakness on the team, it's this unit. The Eagles have generally lacked a return man with explosion and swift moves since Westbrook gave up those duties to become a full-time running back. Jackson is expected to change that, however. He brings a résumé rife with accolades after setting the Pac-10 career record with six punts returned for touchdowns at California. David Akers is still one of the more reliable kickers in the league, though there are some signs of decline. Akers connected on all 22 kicks from 39 yards or less, but converted just two of 10 from 40 yards or more. He's also lost some leg strength on his kickoffs. Punter Sav Rocca, an Australian import, struggled in his first NFL season to adapt to the American professional game. He came on late and showed tremendous leg strength, but his directional punting needs some work. **GRADE: D**

BOTTOM LINE

The Eagles threw a bundle of cash at Samuel to upgrade the defense, stayed committed to McNabb after a so-so season and addressed some depth concerns during the draft in an effort to gear up for a Super Bowl run. However, Philadelphia also missed its opportunity to bring in the game-changing wide receiver for which McNabb publicly lobbied. Health will be a key factor in determining the Eagles' fate in 2008. If McNabb can regain his pre-knee-injury form and still make plays on his feet when the pocket collapses, the offense has a better chance to succeed. And if Dawkins can stay on the field, the defense is likewise better off. But injuries to either could turn a Super Bowl run into another last-place finish in the NFC East.

81
FINAL GRADE
STOCK REPORT
UP

HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL

ROSTER

QUARTERBACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
14 Feeley, A.J.	QB	6-3	220	05/16/1977	5	Oregon
4 Kolb, Kevin	QB	6-3	218	08/24/1984	1	Houston
5 McNabb, Donovan	QB	6-2	240	11/25/1976	9	Syracuse

OFFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
73 Andrews, Shawn	G	6-4	335	12/25/1982	4	Arkansas
59 Cole, Nick	C	6-0	350	07/28/1984	2	New Mexico State
46 Dorenbos, Jon	C	6-0	250	07/21/1980	5	UTEP
79 Herremans, Todd	G	6-6	321	10/13/1982	3	Saginaw Valley
67 Jackson, Jamaal	C	6-4	330	05/08/1980	3	Delaware State
62 Jean-Gilles, Max	G	6-3	358	11/19/1983	1	Georgia
74 Justice, Winston	T	6-6	320	09/14/1984	1	USC
64 Rodgers, Stefan	T	6-5	310	11/03/1981	0	Lambuth
69 Runyan, Jon	T	6-7	330	11/27/1973	12	Michigan
72 Thomas, William	T	6-7	335	11/20/1974	10	Florida State
71 Young, Scott	G	6-4	312	07/15/1981	2	Brigham Young

RUNNING BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
25 Booker, Lorenzo	RB	5-10	191	06/14/1984	1	Florida State
28 Buckhalter, Correll	RB	6-0	217	10/06/1978	4	Nebraska
34 Davis, Jason	RB	5-11	240	11/02/1983	0	Illinois
29 Hunt, Tony	RB	6-1	233	11/24/1985	1	Penn State
49 Klecko, Dan	RB	5-11	275	01/12/1981	5	Temple
23 Moats, Ryan	RB	5-8	210	12/17/1982	2	Louisiana Tech
36 Westbrook, Brian	RB	5-10	203	09/02/1979	6	Villanova

RECEIVERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
81 Avant, Jason	WR	6-0	212	04/20/1983	2	Michigan
84 Baskett, Hank	WR	6-4	220	09/04/1982	2	New Mexico
86 Brown, Reggie	WR	6-1	197	01/13/1981	3	Georgia
87 Celek, Brent	TE	6-4	255	01/25/1985	1	Cincinnati
11 Childress, Bam	WR	5-10	185	03/31/1982	2	Ohio State
80 Curtis, Kevin	WR	6-0	186	07/17/1978	5	Utah State
19 Gasperson, Michael	WR	6-4	220	06/10/1982	1	San Diego
85 Jones, Jamal	WR	5-11	205	04/24/1981	2	North Carolina A&T
83 Lewis, Greg	WR	6-0	180	02/12/1980	5	Illinois
13 Sampy, Bill	WR	5-11	192	05/10/1983	0	Louisiana-Lafayette
89 Schobel, Matt	TE	6-5	255	11/04/1978	6	TCU
82 Smith, L.J.	TE	6-3	258	05/13/1980	5	Rutgers
88 Wilson, Kris	TE	6-2	251	08/22/1981	4	Pittsburgh

DEFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
78 Abiamiri, Victor	DE	6-4	267	01/14/1986	1	Notre Dame
97 Bunkley, Brodrick	DT	6-2	306	11/23/1983	2	Florida State
76 Clark, Jeremy	DT	6-3	309	09/06/1983	0	Alabama
91 Clemons, Chris	DE	6-3	240	10/30/1981	3	Georgia
58 Cole, Trent	DE	6-3	270	10/05/1982	3	Cincinnati
90 Howard, Darren	DE	6-3	275	11/19/1976	8	Kansas State
65 Jackson, Xzavie	DE	6-3	278	09/21/1984	0	Missouri
95 McDougle, Jerome	DE	6-2	264	12/15/1978	3	Miami (FL)
98 Patterson, Mike	DT	6-0	292	09/01/1983	3	USC
77 Ramsey, LaJuan	DT	6-3	300	03/19/1984	2	USC
94 Reagor, Montae	DT	6-3	285	06/29/1977	9	Texas Tech
61 Schable, A.J.	DE	6-3	281	05/18/1984	1	South Dakota
72 Thomas, Juqua	DE	6-2	250	05/15/1978	7	Oklahoma State

DEFENSIVE BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
24 Brown, Sheldon	CB	5-10	200	03/19/1979	6	South Carolina
37 Considine, Sean	S	6-0	212	10/28/1981	3	Iowa
41 Davis, Tanard	CB	5-9	184	01/27/1983	0	Miami (FL)
20 Dawkins, Brian	S	6-0	210	10/13/1973	12	Clemson
31 Fontenot, Therrian	CB	5-10	187	06/28/1981	2	Fresno State
35 Graham, Nick	CB	5-10	191	01/19/1984	1	Tulsa
21 Hanson, Joselio	CB	5-9	185	08/13/1981	3	Texas Tech
27 Mikell, Quintin	S	5-10	206	09/16/1980	5	Boise State
32 Paschal, Marcus	S	6-0	201	08/31/1984	1	Iowa
30 Reed, J.R.	S	5-11	202	02/11/1982	3	South Florida
22 Samuel, Asante	CB	5-10	185	01/06/1981	5	UCF
26 Sheppard, Lito	CB	5-10	194	04/08/1981	6	Florida

LINEBACKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
50 Boiman, Rocky	LB	6-4	236	01/24/1980	6	Notre Dame
55 Bradley, Stewart	LB	6-3	254	11/02/1983	1	Nebraska
96 Gaither, Omar	LB	6-1	235	03/18/1984	2	Tennessee
57 Gocong, Chris	LB	6-2	263	11/16/1983	1	Cal Poly
56 Jordan, Akeem	LB	6-1	226	08/17/1985	1	James Madison
52 Togafau, Pago	LB	5-10	250	01/10/1984	1	Idaho State

KICKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
2 Akers, David	K	5-10	200	12/09/1974	10	Louisville
6 Rocca, Saverio	P	6-5	265	11/20/1973	1	None

▶ **ANDY REID,** *Head coach*

Marty Mornhinweg, asst. head coach/off. coord.; **Jim Johnson**, def. coord.; **Rory Segrest**, special teams coord.; **Pete Jenkins**, def. line; **Juan Castillo**, off. line; **David Culley**, wide receivers; **Tom Melvin**, tight ends; **Sean McDermott**, secondary; **Bill Shuey**, linebackers; **Pat Shurmur**, quarterbacks; **Ted Williams**, running backs; **Trent Walters**, secondary; **Otis Smith**, asst. secondary

ST. LOUIS RAMS

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE

(an opponent breaks down the Rams)

"On offense, they've upgraded. They're about four or five deep now in decent receivers. On the offensive line, Orlando Pace has kind of had some weird injuries. But he's so athletic and gifted. Jacob Bell, I'm not crazy about. I think the two guys they've drafted, John Greco and Roy Schuening, are better than he is. Richie Incognito, he's a good player, but his head's screwed up. You never know where he's going to be from one day to the next.

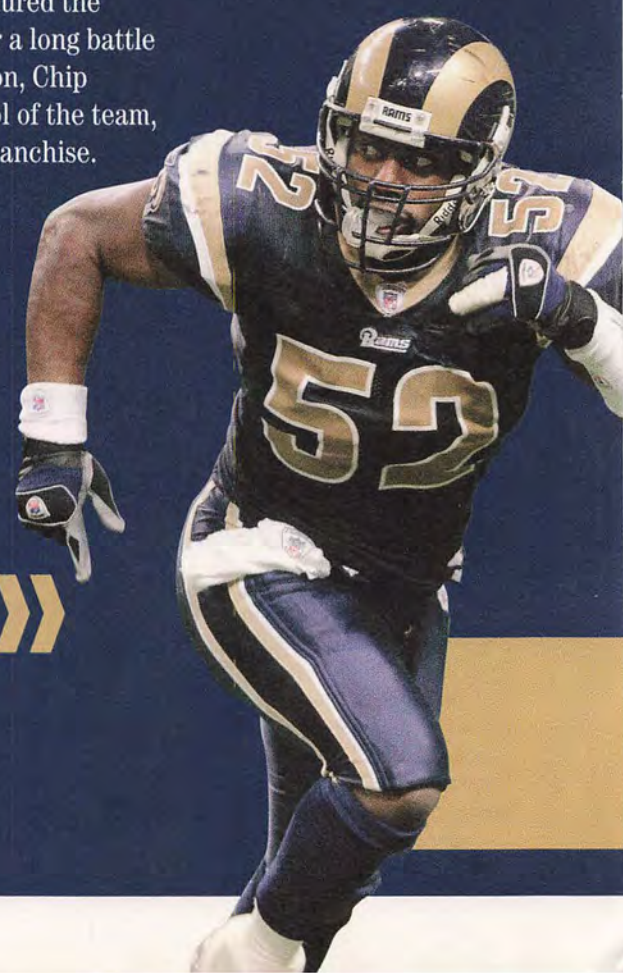
"Al Saunders is a good (offensive) coordinator, so that'll help. I don't think there's any question they'll be better on offense, but on defense they don't have that difference-maker. They're getting better with Chris Long and Adam Carriker up front. Their weaknesses are their linebackers and secondary. Fakhir Brown, (Oshiomogho) Atogwe, they're just guys. Will Witherspoon's really out of place in the middle. Pisa Tinoisamoa's a high-energy guy, but I don't think he's very instinctive."

While Linehan's losses add up, Long offers hope for the future

By Jim Thomas, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

No coach in the NFL enters the season on a warmer seat than Scott Linehan. His second Rams team started 0-8 a year ago and stumbled across the finish line at 3-13—the second-worst record in the league. The empty seats and blacked-out games didn't go unnoticed by team management, which not only struggled through a bad product on the field but also endured the death of owner Georgia Frontiere after a long battle with breast cancer. With Frontiere's son, Chip Rosenbloom, assuming majority control of the team, there's nowhere to go but up for this franchise.

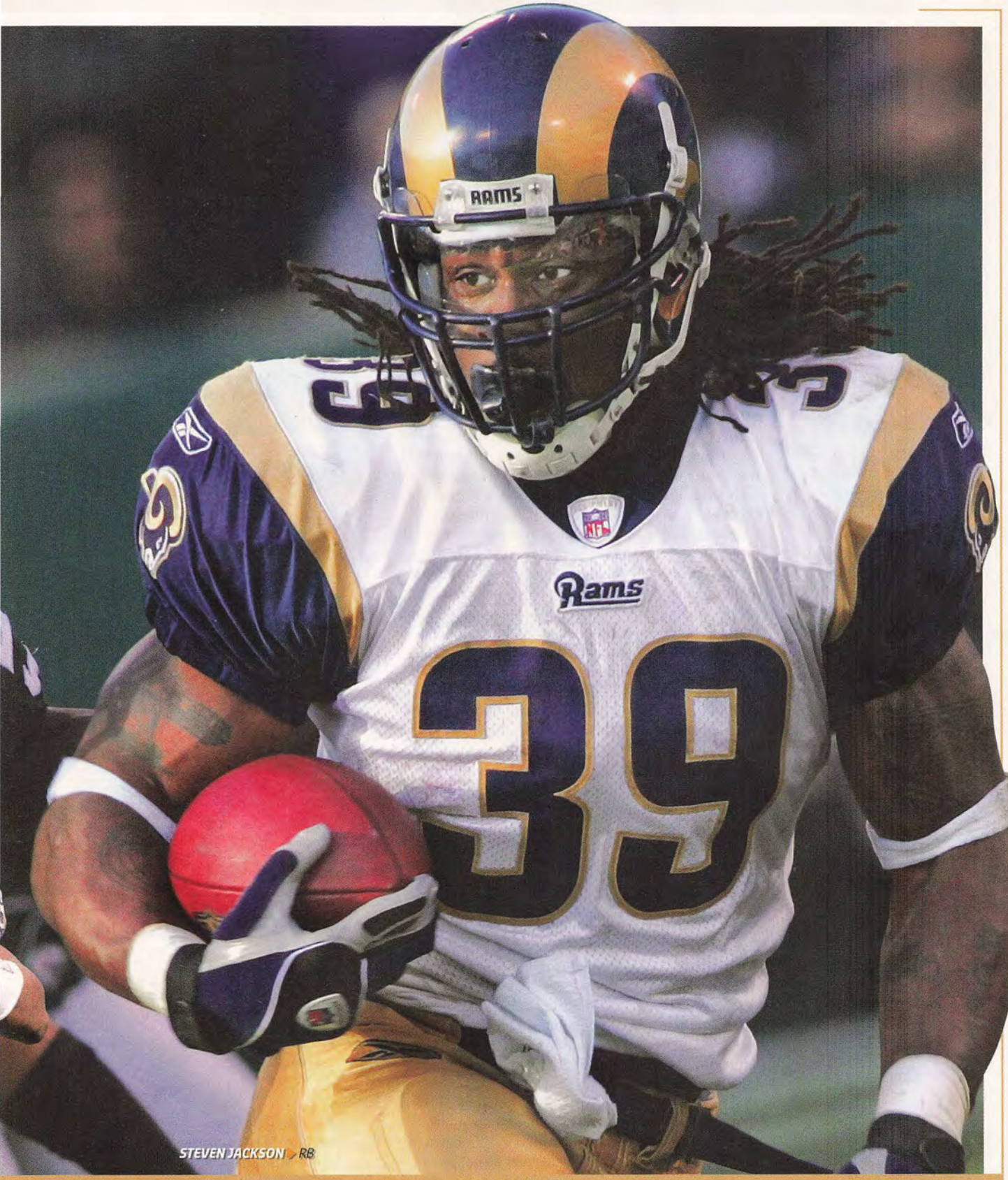
In fairness to Linehan, he inherited the aging remnants of what once was an electrifying offense. But as the losses mounted last season, more veterans publicly snapped at him. The "action" on the sidelines often proved more gripping than anything on the field. Linehan must regain the veterans' trust and reestablish himself as a leader.



BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

CHRIS DRAFT ▸ LB

With the departure of Brandon Chillar to Green Bay via free agency, Draft has the inside track for the starting job on the strong side. Draft isn't as fast as Pisa Tinoisamoa and Will Witherspoon, but he's more of a collision player who's rarely out of position.



STEVEN JACKSON ▸ RB

ONLINE

www.sportingnews.com/nfl/teams/rams
www.stlouisrams.com

2007 RECORD

OVERALL: 3-13 ▸ HOME: 1-7

STADIUM

EDWARD JONES DOME
Capacity: 66,000
Turf: FieldTurf Tickets: 314-425-8830
Training Camp: Location unavailable at press time

SN PICK

2

NFC WEST
(7-9)

(OPPOSITE): SCOTT BOEHM / GETTY IMAGES; TODD WARSHAW FOR SN

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 @ Philadelphia
SEPT. 7 | 1:00
—
SCORE

WEEK 2 New York Giants
SEPT. 14 | 1:00
—
SCORE

WEEK 3 @ SEATTLE
SEPT. 21 | 4:05
—
SCORE

WEEK 4 Buffalo
SEPT. 28 | 4:05
—
SCORE

WEEK 5 *OPEN DATE*

WEEK 6 @ Washington
OCT. 12 | 1:00
—
SCORE

WEEK 7 Dallas
OCT. 19 | 1:00
—
SCORE

WEEK 8 @ New England
OCT. 26 | 1:00
—
SCORE

WEEK 9 Arizona
NOV. 2 | 1:00
—
SCORE

WEEK 10 @ New York Jets
NOV. 9 | 1:00
—
SCORE

WEEK 11 @ San Francisco
NOV. 16 | 4:05
—
SCORE

WEEK 12 Chicago
NOV. 23 | 1:00
—
SCORE

WEEK 13 Miami
NOV. 30 | 1:00
—
SCORE

WEEK 14 @ Arizona
DEC. 7 | 4:15
—
SCORE

WEEK 15 Seattle
DEC. 14 | 1:00
—
SCORE

WEEK 16 San Francisco
DEC. 21 | 1:00
—
SCORE

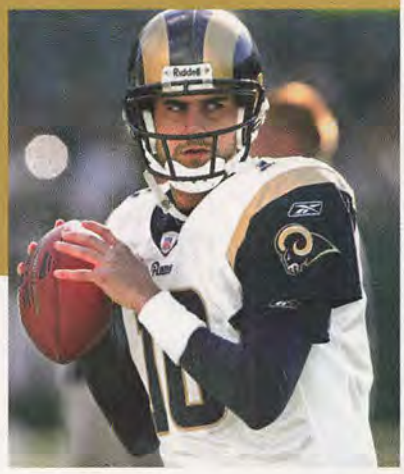
WEEK 17 @ Atlanta
DEC. 28 | 1:00
—
SCORE

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

THE BOOK ON ... MARC BULGER *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"He's really one of the most accurate passers in the league right now. You just have to give him time. You have to protect him, and they've had some offensive-line breakdowns lately. But if they shore that up and (Orlando) Pace is healthy. . .

"He's not great under pressure. He's not the most physically gifted guy. He's not real mobile. He'd rather sit in the pocket because he has such a quick release. He's not one that does a lot of improvising. He's had problems with injuries. He's not a very big guy; that could always be his issue with injuries. He's going to get nicked up. But if he's healthy and he has time, he's as good as anyone throwing the rock. He's got one of the most underrated arms in the league. But I like Bulger. Bulger's fine. He's not their problem."



OFFENSE

Al Saunders was part of the "Greatest Show on Turf" in St. Louis at the start of this decade. And the offense he runs is very similar to the Mike Martz system. It involves using lots of shifts and motions to create favorable matchups. In terms of route-running, the system uses every part of the field. The difference with Martz is that Saunders also stresses the run and knows how to use a big back like Steven Jackson.

Quarterbacks Marc Bulger has experienced the best of times and the worst of times in two seasons under Linehan. In 2006, he posted career numbers, including a stellar 24-to-8 ratio of TD passes to interceptions. But he regressed significantly last season, battered and bruised from opening day on, and missed games with broken ribs and a concussion. The addition of veteran quarterback coach Terry Shea should help Bulger regain some of the mechanics and footwork that suffered under duress in '07.

There's no doubt that a healthy Bulger, given time, is one of the league's best pocket passers. Any improvement for the Rams this season begins and ends with him. Normally soft-spoken, Bulger is trying to assert himself more as a leader as he begins his sixth season as the starting quarterback in St. Louis. The addition of veteran Trent Green as a backup should help on several fronts. For one, Green is very familiar with the new offensive system brought in by Saunders—one that has changed somewhat since Bulger ran it under Martz. For another, although clearly the backup this time around in St. Louis, the highly competitive Green will push Bulger in practice. **GRADE: B**

Running backs With Isaac Bruce gone and Torry Holt battling what could be a chronic knee problem, Jackson is the centerpiece of the St. Louis offense now more than ever. Jackson has put together three consecutive seasons of 1,000 yards-plus rushing. He did so in '07 even though he missed nearly five full games with groin and back injuries. A healthy Jackson putting up numbers similar to his Pro Bowl campaign of 2006 is a must if the Rams are to become viable playoff contenders. Jackson at his best is among the top two or three backs in the NFL—an imposing combination of size, speed, power and pass-catching ability.

If Jackson misses time with injuries, the Rams' running game becomes ordinary in a hurry. Save for a 43-yard run against New Orleans, Antonio Pittman wasn't overwhelming as Jackson's backup over the second half of last season. As for Brian Leonard, the team doesn't seem to know what to do with him. Is he an undersized fullback? A third-down back with good hands but average speed? Or a No. 2 running back who can move the pile but doesn't have much wiggle? The lack of a pile-driving fullback doesn't help in short-yardage situations. **GRADE: B-**

Receivers For the first time since 1993, when the team was still called the Los Angeles Rams, Bruce won't be a part of the receiver corps. How

5-YEAR WINS TREND

NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	297.5	24
RUSHING	95.4	25
PASSING	202.1	19
SCORING	263	28
PUNT RETURNS	11.9	4
KICK RETURNS	23.6	9
RED ZONE TD %	43.6	25
TOTAL DEFENSE	341.1	21
AGAINST RUSH	115.3	20
AGAINST PASS	225.8	21
POINTS ALLOWED	438	31
INTERCEPTIONS	18	10t
SACKS	31	21t
TURNOVER DIFF.	-10	27

TODD WARSHAW FOR SN

the team copes with his absence, and replaces his productivity, will have a lot to say about the effectiveness of the passing game. So will the health of seven-time Pro Bowler Holt, who still put up very respectable numbers in '07 but was slowed by knee problems that could plague him for the rest of his career. At his best, Holt is among the elite receivers in the game—a beacon of consistency who runs precise routes, has very good hands and deceptive deep speed.

Drew Bennett, who replaces Bruce as a starter, must improve in a big way over his disappointing '07 campaign. Bennett is a big target with some run-after-the-catch ability. The No. 3 receiver job is up for grabs, but speedy second-round rookie Donnie Avery is the favorite. There should be intense competition for backup roles among veterans Reche Caldwell, Dante Hall and Dane Looker; youngsters Marques Hagans and Derek Stanley; and rookie Keenan Burton.

The addition of blocking specialist Anthony Becht rounds out a solid corps of tight ends headlined by veteran Randy McMichael. **GRADE: C+**

Offensive line » Seven-time Pro Bowler Orlando Pace has missed 23 of 32 games over the past two seasons because of shoulder and triceps injuries. A healthy Pace at left tackle gives this line instant credibility and means less hits on Bulger. The Rams made a conscious effort to upgrade their blocking, beginning with the free-agent addition of Jacob Bell, an ascending player who has the toughness to move bodies in the running game and the athleticism to hold off pass rushers. Richie Incognito is an old-school mauler at right guard, a physical player whose temper sometimes gets him in trouble. Right tackle Alex Barron remains an enigma, a gifted athlete prone to penalties. He has played decently but never reached his potential. The center position is the biggest question mark on the line. Returnee Brett Romberg is smart and tenacious, but undersized. He's battling converted guard Mark Setterstrom for the starting spot.

The addition of tackle John Greco and guard Roy Schuening in the draft provides needed depth—both are good enough to be future starters. The re-signing of guard/tackle Adam Goldberg and tackle Brandon Gorin also helps. Nonetheless, if Pace goes down with another injury, there is a big drop-off at tackle. **GRADE: C**

» DEFENSE

Coordinator Jim Haslett loves multiple looks with his front seven, and favors man-to-man coverage in the secondary. He isn't afraid to take chances and will blitz

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

	OFFENSE	
QB	Marc Bulger	Trent Green
FB	Brian Leonard	Joe Klopfenstein
RB	Steven Jackson	Antonio Pittman
WR	Torry Holt	Donnie Avery
WR	Drew Bennett	Dante Hall
TE	Randy McMichael	Anthony Becht
LT	Orlando Pace	Brandon Gorin
LG	Jacob Bell	Adam Goldberg
C	Brett Romberg	Mark Setterstrom
RG	Richie Incognito	Roy Schuening
RT	Alex Barron	John Greco

	DEFENSE	
LE	Leonard Little	Victor Adeyanju
DT	La'Roi Glover	Claude Wroten
DT	Adam Carriker	Clifton Ray
RE	Chris Long	James Hall
SLB	Chris Draft	Quinton Culberson
MLB	Will Witherspoon	Tim McGarigle
WLB	Pisa Tinoisamoa	Chris Chamberlain
LCB	Tye Hill	Ron Bartell
SS	Corey Chavous	Todd Johnson
FS	Oshiomogho "O.J." Atogwe	Jerome Carter
RCB	Fakhir Brown	Jonathan Wade

	SPECIALISTS
K	Josh Brown
P	Donnie Jones
KR	Dante Hall
PR	Dante Hall
LS	Chris Massey

RAMS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

BOB LEVERONE / SN

1 » Les Richter *(1954-62)*
Eight-time Pro Bowler on early L.A. Rams teams who also kicked, making 29 NFL field goals.

2 » Isiah Robertson *(1971-78)*
Six-time Pro Bowler and two-time All-Pro who played behind the Fearsome Foursome.

3 » Jack Reynolds *(1970-80)*
Earning the nickname "Hacksaw," the two-time Pro Bowler was one of the NFC's most feared defenders in the 1970s.

» DRAFT REPORT GRADE ▸ A

After years of poor drafting because of a dysfunctional front office, the duo of executive vice president of player personnel Billy Devaney and coach Scott Linehan did an excellent job in the 2008 draft. St. Louis made a great selection with the No. 2 overall pick in DE **Chris Long**, who plays with outstanding passion and intensity on every snap. **Donnie Avery** is an explosive receiver with great hands and rare open-field running ability. Additionally, he showed improved route-running at the Senior Bowl and looks to be a big playmaking receiver for the Rams. **John Greco** was another great selection, as he has the athleticism and feet to play either right tackle or guard and reminds some of Patriots Pro Bowl guard Logan Mankins. Cornerback **Justin King** is a top-level athlete who has all the tools to become a quality starter but needs to improve his technique and play with more aggression. Wideout **Keenan Burton** runs sharp routes and has very good hands, which should make him a solid backup. Don't be shocked to see guard **Roy Schuening** as a starter in a couple of seasons. He is technically sound, and his technique, effort and strength help him to consistently keep his man blocked. The Rams grabbed two seventh-round linebackers in **Chris Chamberlain** and **David Vobora**, who are both likely to contribute on special teams initially but have the potential to be in the rotation in a couple of years.

» 2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
1	2	Long, Chris	DE	6-4	284	Virginia
2	2	Avery, Donnie	WR	5-11	190	Houston
3	2	Greco, John	T	6-5	325	Toledo
4	2	King, Justin	CB	6-0	186	Penn State
4	29	Burton, Keenan	WR	6-1	200	Kentucky
5	22	Schuening, Roy	G	6-4	308	Oregon State
7	21	Chamberlain, Chris	S	6-2	226	Tulsa
7	45	Vobora, David	LB	6-1	236	Idaho

ROSTER

#	QUARTERBACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
13	Berlin, Brock	QB	6-1	215	07/04/1981	1	Miami (FL)
10	Bulger, Marc	QB	6-3	212	04/05/1977	6	West Virginia
12	Green, Trent	QB	6-3	217	07/09/1970	10	Indiana

#	OFFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
70	Barron, Alex	T	6-7	315	09/28/1982	3	Florida State
63	Bell, Jacob	G	6-4	295	03/02/1981	4	Miami (OH)
62	Fry, Dustin	C	6-3	314	10/03/1983	1	Clemson
73	Goldberg, Adam	T	6-7	318	08/12/1980	4	Wyoming
77	Gorin, Brandon	T	6-6	308	07/17/1978	4	Purdue
68	Incognito, Richie	G	6-3	330	07/05/1983	2	Nebraska
60	Leckey, Nick	C	6-3	300	03/12/1982	4	Kansas State
75	LeVoir, Mark	T	6-7	306	07/29/1982	0	Notre Dame
76	Pace, Orlando	T	6-7	325	11/04/1975	11	Ohio State
71	Petitti, Rob	T	6-6	327	05/21/1982	3	Pittsburgh
61	Raiola, Donovan	C	6-2	293	12/13/1982	0	Wisconsin
65	Romberg, Brett	C	6-2	298	10/10/1979	2	Miami (FL)
66	Setterstrom, Mark	G	6-4	314	03/03/1984	2	Minnesota

#	RUNNING BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
39	Jackson, Steven	RB	6-2	231	07/22/1983	4	Oregon State
23	Leonard, Brian	RB	6-1	226	02/03/1984	1	Rutgers
45	Massey, Chris	RB	6-0	245	08/21/1979	6	Marshall
22	Minor, Travis	RB	5-10	203	06/30/1979	7	Florida State
30	Pittman, Antonio	RB	5-11	195	12/19/1985	1	Ohio State

#	RECEIVERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
87	Becht, Anthony	TE	6-5	280	08/08/1977	8	West Virginia
83	Bennett, Drew	WR	6-5	206	08/26/1978	7	UCLA
86	Caldwell, Reche	WR	6-0	210	03/28/1979	6	Florida
18	Fowler, Eric	WR	6-3	198	10/17/1984	0	Grand Valley State
15	Hagans, Marques	WR	5-10	205	12/29/1982	1	Virginia
82	Hall, Dante	WR	5-8	187	09/20/1978	8	Texas A&M
48	Harrington, Dedrick	TE	6-3	248	09/25/1983	1	Missouri
81	Holt, Torry	WR	6-0	190	06/05/1976	9	North Carolina State
88	Klopfenstein, Joe	TE	6-5	262	11/09/1983	2	Colorado
89	Looker, Dane	WR	6-0	194	05/05/1976	6	Washington
84	McMichael, Randy	TE	6-3	255	06/28/1979	6	Georgia
49	Owens, Richard	TE	6-4	273	11/04/1980	4	Louisville
19	Stanley, Derek	WR	5-11	179	08/27/1985	1	Wisconsin-Whitewater
16	Williams, Brandon	WR	5-11	183	02/24/1984	2	Wisconsin

#	DEFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
94	Adeyanju, Victor	DE	6-4	280	02/11/1983	2	Indiana
98	Ah You, C.J.	DE	6-4	275	07/07/1982	0	Oklahoma
90	Carriker, Adam	DT	6-6	296	05/06/1984	1	Nebraska
97	Glover, La'Roi	DT	6-2	290	07/04/1974	12	San Diego State
96	Hall, James	DE	6-2	280	02/04/1977	8	Michigan
91	Little, Leonard	DE	6-3	263	10/19/1974	10	Tennessee
92	Moore, Eric	DE	6-4	268	02/28/1981	3	Florida State
95	Ryan, Clifton	DT	6-3	310	02/18/1984	1	Michigan State
99	Wroten, Claude	DT	6-2	295	09/16/1983	2	LSU

#	DEFENSIVE BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
21	Atogwe, Oshiomogho	S	5-11	210	06/23/1981	3	Stanford
24	Bartell, Ron	CB	6-1	205	02/22/1982	3	Howard
41	Bassey, Eric	CB	6-1	200	01/23/1983	1	Oklahoma
34	Brown, Fakhir	CB	5-11	192	09/21/1977	8	Grambling State
42	Carter, Jerome	S	5-11	219	10/25/1982	3	Florida State
25	Chavous, Corey	S	6-1	208	01/05/1976	10	Vanderbilt
26	Hill, Tye	CB	5-10	185	06/03/1982	2	Clemson
35	Johnson, Todd	S	6-1	200	12/18/1978	4	Florida
27	Macklin, David	CB	5-10	206	07/14/1978	8	Penn State
31	Vinnett, Darius	CB	5-8	170	09/30/1984	1	Arkansas
20	Wade, Jonathan	CB	5-10	195	03/27/1984	1	Tennessee

#	LINEBACKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
53	Culberson, Quinton	LB	6-1	236	10/21/1985	1	Mississippi State
52	Draft, Chris	LB	5-11	232	02/26/1976	10	Stanford
59	McGarigle, Tim	LB	6-0	240	10/25/1983	1	Northwestern
50	Tinoisamoa, Pisa	LB	6-1	235	07/15/1981	5	Hawaii
51	Witherspoon, Will	LB	6-1	240	08/19/1980	6	Georgia

#	KICKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
3	Brown, Josh	K	6-0	212	04/29/1979	5	Nebraska
2	Douglas, Sean	P	6-1	216	07/01/1984	1	Washington
5	Jones, Donnie	P	6-3	222	07/05/1980	4	LSU
7	Medlock, Justin	K	5-11	201	10/23/1983	1	UCLA

▶ **SCOTT LINEHAN,** *Head coach*

Al Saunders, off. coord.; **Jim Haslett**, def. coord.; **Rick Venturi**, asst. head coach/linebackers; **Art Valero**, asst. head coach/running backs; **Brian Baker**, def. line; **Steve Loney**, off. line; **Jim Chaney**, tight ends; **Mike Cox**, asst. secondary; **Henry Ellard**, wide receivers; **Ron Milus**, secondary; **Al Roberts**, special teams; **Terry Shea**, quarterbacks; **Bob Saunders**, off. asst./asst. wide receivers

repeatedly if the front four isn't generating a pass rush. The variety of packages and mix-and-match personnel can give even the most experienced QB headaches. The addition of Chris Long adds another versatile piece to the puzzle. With a bit better health, this could be a top-15 unit this season.

Defensive line ▶▶ A healthy Leonard Little at left end and instant contributions from No. 2 overall draft pick Long at right end could do wonders for a defensive-end corps that registered a meager 5.5 sacks last season. Little has been one of the game's best edge rushers this decade, but after a 13-sack season in 2006, he managed just one sack a year ago when limited to seven games because of a painful toe injury that required surgery. Although not a natural pass rusher, Long is an extra-effort player with underrated athleticism. He should help on the field and in the locker room with his energy and leadership qualities.

James Hall, a disappointment as a starter a year ago, will be the first end off the bench. The Rams passed on LSU defensive tackle Glenn Dorsey to select Long in the draft; time will tell if that was the right decision. As much as the Rams needed pass-rush help, their undersized front seven struggled stopping the run as well. Big things are needed from second-year tackles Adam Carriker and Clifton Ryan. La'Roi Glover pairs with Carriker in the starting lineup, but the Rams want to limit Glover's snaps at age 34. If used properly, Glover remains an effective pass rusher. **GRADE: C**

Linebackers ▶▶ The underrated Will Witherspoon heads a speedy but undersized unit. Although some might debate whether Witherspoon is miscast in the middle, the Rams

WILL WITHERSPOON ▶ *LB*

OFFSEASON MOVES

ADDITIONS:

K **Josh Brown** *(FA/Seahawks)*, G **Jacob Bell** *(FA/Titans)*, QB **Trent Green** *(FA/Dolphins)*, DB **David Macklin** *(FA/Redskins)*, WR **Reche Caldwell** *(FA/Redskins)*, TE **Anthony Becht** *(FA/Bucs)*

SUBTRACTIONS:

QB **Gus Frerotte** *(FA/Vikings)*, WR **Issac Bruce** *(FA/49ers)*, LB **Raonall Smith** *(FA)*, RB **Rich Alexis** *(FA)*, TE **Aaron Walker** *(FA)*, DB **Hanik Milligan** *(FA)*, T **Todd Steussie** *(FA)*, K **Jeff Wilkins** *(retired)*, C **Andy McCollum** *(FA)*, LB **Brandon Chillar** *(FA/Packers)*, DE **Trevor Johnson** *(FA)*, TE **Dominique Byrd** *(FA)*

INSIDE THE HEADSET

SCOTT LINEHAN

Linehan likes a balanced attack, one that takes occasional shots downfield while minimizing turnovers. But with him calling plays the past two seasons, the team strayed from the run. Now, with a strong offensive coordinator in Al Saunders, Linehan will become more CEO than hands-on coach, but the basic philosophy remains the same.

(L TO R): TOMASSO DEROSA; HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL

FANTASY SPIN

http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football

JACKSON

McMICHAEL

BENNETT

A healthy and improved offensive line would go a long way toward Marc Bulger recapturing his status as a No. 1 fantasy quarterback. Too many hits last season led to injuries and the inability to strike deep to Torry Holt.

$ BUY Steven Jackson, RB

SELL Randy McMichael, TE

Z SLEEPER Drew Bennett, WR

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/09	L	13-27	Carolina Panthers
09/16	L	16-17	San Francisco 49ers
09/23	L	3-24	at Tampa Bay Buccaneers
09/30	L	7-35	at Dallas Cowboys
10/07	L	31-34	Arizona Cardinals
10/14	L	3-22	at Baltimore Ravens
10/21	L	6-33	at Seattle Seahawks
10/28	L	20-27	Cleveland Browns
11/11	W	37-29	at New Orleans Saints
11/18	W	13-9	at San Francisco 49ers
11/25	L	19-24	Seattle Seahawks
12/02	W	28-16	Atlanta Falcons
12/09	L	10-19	at Cincinnati Bengals
12/16	L	14-33	Green Bay Packers
12/20	L	24-41	Pittsburgh Steelers
12/30	L	19-48	at Arizona Cardinals

WON 3, LOST 13

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Jackson	237	1002	4.2	54	5
Leonard	86	303	3.5	31	0
Pittman	38	139	3.7	43	0
Minor	17	68	4.0	13	0
Hall	3	18	6.0	9	0
Bulger	9	13	1.4	14	0
Stanley	1	5	5.0	5	0
Frerotte	6	3	0.5	2	0
Bruce	2	-4	-2.0	-1	0
Hagans	2	-4	-2.0	-2	0
Berlin	3	-16	-5.3	0	0
RAMS	404	1527	3.8	54	5
OPPONENTS	445	1844	4.1	46	16

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Holt	93	1189	12.8	40	7
Bruce	55	733	13.3	37	4
McMichael	39	429	11.0	29t	3
Jackson	38	271	7.1	37	1
Bennett	33	375	11.4	24	3
Leonard	30	183	6.1	16	0
Minor	12	86	7.2	20	0
Hagans	8	101	12.6	23	0
Looker	6	38	6.3	10	0
Hall	5	27	5.4	12	0
Byrd	4	44	11.0	14	0
Pittman	3	15	5.0	11	0
Klopfenstein	2	37	18.5	36t	1
Walker	2	13	6.5	8	0
Hedgecock	1	7	7.0	7	0
Owens	1	9	9.0	9	0
Taylor	1	4	4.0	4	0
RAMS	333	3561	10.7	40	19
OPPONENTS	318	3847	12.1	83	25

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Bulger	378	221	2392	11	15
Frerotte	167	94	1014	7	12
Berlin	28	17	153	0	1
Jackson	1	1	2	1	0
RAMS	574	333	3561	19	28
OPPONENTS	523	318	3847	25	18

SACKS RAMS 31, OPPONENTS 48

Witherspoon 7, Glover 6, Chavous 3.5, Chillar 2.5, Hall 2.5, Carriker 2, Ryan 2, Bartell 1, Draft 1, Johnson 1, Little 1, Moore 1, Wroten 0.5

seem sold on using him there. He remains a run-and-chase linebacker: not particularly stout at the point of attack but very effective if the defensive front keeps blockers from getting to the second level. The injury to Little forced the Rams to use Witherspoon as an edge rusher in passing situations. Witherspoon responded in a big way with a team-high seven sacks.

Injury-plagued Pisa Tinoisamoa was playing some of the best ball of his career before a knee injury sidelined him for the final four games of '07. He's also a run-and-chase type but is more physical than Witherspoon as a tackler and in taking on blockers.

Veteran Chris Draft and second-year pro Quinton Culberson will compete for the starting job on the strong side. In the Rams' system, this is strictly a two-down position that stresses run defense, along with the ability to take on tight ends and be effective in short and intermediate coverage. Draft is the favorite, but Culberson is a thumper—potentially the most physical linebacker on the roster. **GRADE: C**

Secondary Tye Hill must stay healthy, Fakhir Brown must stay "eligible" and Ron Bartell must capitalize on a contract year at cornerback. At safety, Oshiomogho "O.J." Atogwe must continue ascending, while Corey Chavous must bounce back from an off-year.

Although undersized, Hill is a tenacious competitor with excellent closing speed. Brown is above average in coverage and the best tackler among the corners. But he missed four games after violating the NFL's substance-abuse policy in '07, and only a successful appeal to a subsequent offseason violation prevented him from a possible one-year suspension. Bartell has shown flashes of playmaking ability and solid coverage skills, but he needs to become a more physical player. Rookie Justin King, second-year man Jonathan Wade and journeyman David Macklin will compete for the No. 4 spot.

At free safety, Atogwe registered an NFC-high eight interceptions a year ago to go along with two forced fumbles. Improved tackling and better coverage angles should elevate him to Pro Bowl status. At strong safety, Chavous is nearing the end of a solid career. A chest-muscle injury affected his tackling a year ago, but he's still recognized as the undisputed leader of the secondary. **GRADE: C-**

SPECIAL TEAMS

The team reacted quickly to the surprise retirement of Jeff Wilkins by signing one of the game's best young placekickers in Josh Brown during free agency. As a Seattle Seahawk, Brown defeated the Rams twice with last-second field goals in 2006. His strong leg should help on kickoff coverage.

The punting game is in good hands—or legs—with Donnie Jones, who's coming off a career season. Jones is the complete package, combining distance, hang time and touch to help win field position.

Although not quite up to his vintage form from earlier in his career at Kansas City, Hall added a long-missing spark to the Rams' return game as a kickoff and punt returner. Hall seems to lack the extra gear he possessed with the Chiefs but remains as elusive as ever when healthy (he missed nine games because of injuries last season). Young wideouts Stanley, Burton and Avery will compete for backup roles behind Hall.

Long snapper Chris Massey is still one of the best in the business. However, the Rams' perpetually struggling coverage units, particularly on kickoffs, remain a major area of concern. **GRADE: C+**

BOTTOM LINE

No team in the league has as much of a chance for rapid improvement as St. Louis. This was a team that was crushed by injuries in the first half of the 2007 season and never recovered. Better health alone should result in two or three more victories from last season's debacle. The Rams had a good offseason, with a solid draft coupled with the addition of offensive guard Bell and kicker Brown. But they needed a great offseason. Throw in a brutal opening schedule, with the entire NFC East, New England and Seattle in the first seven games, and a 7-9 finish may be the best St. Louis can do.

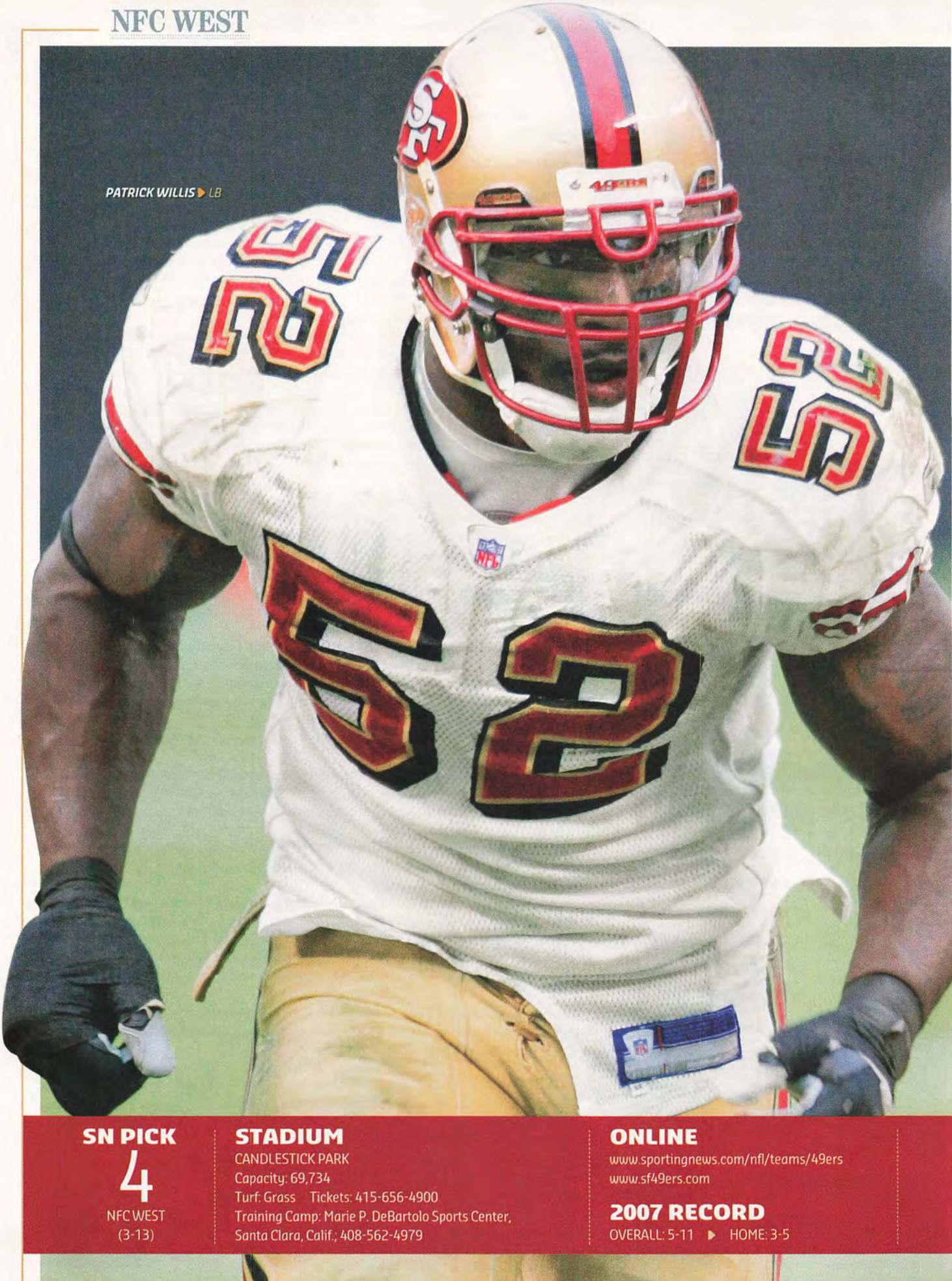
80

FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT

UP

HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL



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2007 RECORD
OVERALL: 5-11 ▶ HOME: 3-5

(L TO R): STEVE BEYER; PAUL JASIENSKI / GETTY IMAGES; HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL

SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS

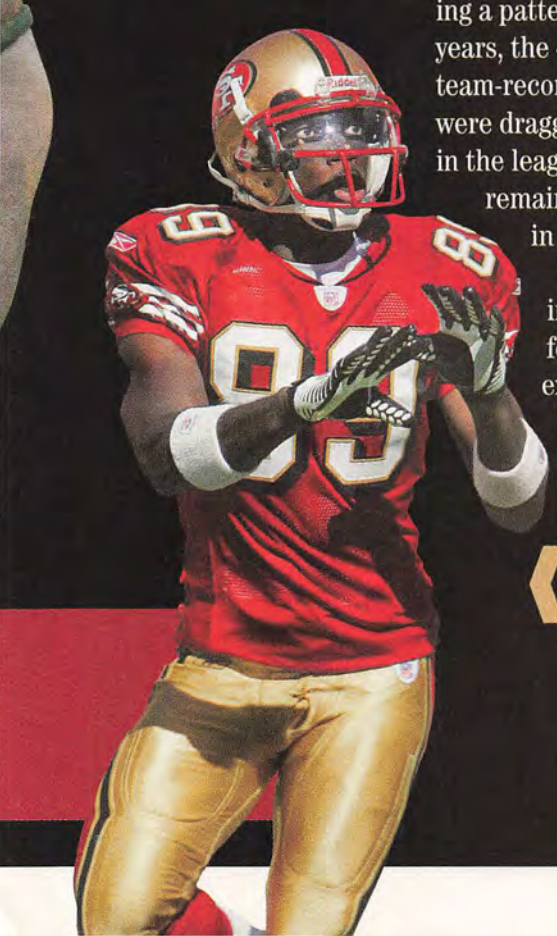
Nolan hoping Martz will get Smith, 49ers' offense rollin'

By Dennis Georgatos

Mike Nolan had a lot of explaining to do after the 49ers' 5-11 finish last year. He must have had a way with words because owner John York opted to bring him back, marking the first time in 49ers history that a coach was retained after presiding over three consecutive losing seasons.

Projected as an up-and-coming team after displaying a pattern of improvement in Nolan's first two years, the 49ers instead imploded en route to their team-record fifth consecutive losing season. They were dragged down by the least-productive offense in the league, which also wore down a defense that remained on the field more than any other unit in the NFL.

Fallout from the disappointing campaign includes sharply reduced expectations for the 49ers, who face an uphill battle to exceed last year's win total while competing in an improved NFC West.



BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

JASON HILL ▸ WR

Hill battled groin and hamstring problems during a one-catch rookie campaign that barely saw him get on the field. But he's healthy now and will get his chance to show what he can do. With a physical style to help defeat the jam and the speed to get separation from defenders, Hill stands to develop into one of the more inviting targets for the 49ers' quarterbacks.

INSIDE THE HEADSET

MIKE NOLAN

Nolan can be a risk-taker on defense but trends toward conservatism when the offense is on the field. He favors an aggressive, attacking style focused on creating opportunities by forcing turnovers. As a game manager, he is often content to try and keep games close in hopes of a late swing in momentum.

OFFSEASON MOVES

ADDITIONS:

DB **Allen Rossum** *(FA/Steelers)*, RB **DeShaun Foster** *(FA/Panthers)*, QB **J.T. O'Sullivan** *(FA/Lions)*, WR **Isaac Bruce** *(FA/Rams)*, LB **Dontarrious Thomas** *(FA/Vikings)*, DE **Justin Smith** *(FA/Bengals)*, WR **Bryant Johnson** *(FA/Cardinals)*

SUBTRACTIONS:

LB **Derek Smith** *(FA/Chargers)*, RB **Maurice Hicks** *(FA/Vikings)*, DE **Marques Douglas** *(FA/Buccaneers)*, QB **Chris Weinke** *(FA)*, WR **Michael Lewis** *(FA)*, T **Kwame Harris** *(FA/Raiders)*, WR **Bryan Gilmore** *(FA)*, G **Larry Allen** *(FA)*, DT **Bryant Young** *(FA)*, G **Justin Smiley** *(FA/Dolphins)*, QB **Trent Dilfer** *(FA)*, WR **Darrell Jackson** *(FA/Broncos)*

Then there's the relationship between quarterback Alex Smith and Nolan. The two feuded publicly last season over their differing interpretations of the severity of a shoulder injury to Smith. The shoulder separation eventually led Smith to undergo season-ending surgery. He's expected to be ready for training camp, and Smith and Nolan say they've patched things up. But questions remain about the ability of Smith, the No. overall 1 pick in 2005, to develop into a franchise quarterback. And Nolan says Smith no longer has any guarantee of being the starting QB.

OFFENSE

The 49ers brought in Mike Martz with hopes that he can rejuvenate what was a moribund offense last season under the since-fired Jim Hostler. Free-wheeling and innovative, Martz will bring the same precision, timing-oriented attack that became the "Greatest Show on Turf" while he worked in St. Louis as an offensive coordinator and head coach. The system is the fourth in as many seasons for the team's top two quarterbacks, Smith and Hill. Look for Martz to find creative ways to get the ball in the hands of running back Frank Gore, who could command a Marshall Faulk-type role.

Quarterbacks Heading into Smith's fourth season, the 49ers still don't know what they have in the former No. 1 pick. Smith had a disastrous rookie campaign, showed tremendous progress in his second year under the tutelage of Norv Turner, but regressed mightily last season while dealing with the shoulder injury. The 49ers are hoping Smith's wayward passes and jittery pocket presence were due in large part to a lack of strong, cogent coaching from Hostler, who was a rookie coordinator.

Martz was brought in to try to help salvage Smith's career, but the move also means Smith will be learning his fourth system in as many seasons with the 49ers. Martz says he can help Smith realize his potential, but only if he's willing to scrap everything he's learned so he can absorb the new timing-oriented scheme with a clean slate.

No matter how Smith responds, Nolan is through simply handing the starting job to him. Keeping it will require beating out Shaun Hill, a journeyman who gained the respect of coaches and players when he led the 49ers to wins in his first two career starts last December. Hill doesn't have the greatest arm strength, but his delivery is quick and accurate and his decision-making solid.

J.T. O'Sullivan, a backup in Detroit last year when Martz was the Lions' offensive coordinator, is the only one of the three with experience in Martz's system. **GRADE: C**

Running backs Gore stands out as the 49ers' most explosive offensive player, and Martz wasted no time in characterizing him as a centerpiece in the 49ers' attack. A tough, powerful runner between the tackles, Gore also has the speed and elusiveness to break a long gainer. He is also a capable receiver out of the backfield, giving him the all-purpose qualities reminiscent of Faulk in his prime. Look for Martz to devise ways to put the ball into Gore's hands, whether as a runner or receiver.

Gore has thrived in his workhorse role—he has rushed for more than 1,000 yards in each of the last two seasons—but the 49ers made a point of trying to ease the load by adding DeShaun Foster in free agency. The former Carolina Panther gives the 49ers a viable backup for Gore, who's heading into his third season as the team's starter. A quick, slashing runner, Foster is also solid as a receiver, but he has had problems at times with fumbles. Moran Norris was Gore's lead blocker the past two seasons, but it remains to be seen how he'll fit in with Martz's scheme, which tends to favor multiple-receiver sets in which the fullback often leaves the field. **GRADE: A**

Receivers The 49ers have made attempts in recent years, through free agency and the draft, to add a signature playmaker at receiver, but it hasn't panned out thus far. Their latest try centers on the free-agency acquisitions of Isaac Bruce and Bryant Johnson.

5-YEAR WINS TREND

NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	237.3	32
RUSHING	92.3	27
PASSING	145.0	32
SCORING	219	32
PUNT RETURNS	8.6	19
KICK RETURNS	23.3	11
RED ZONE TD %	51.7	16
TOTAL DEFENSE	346.2	25
AGAINST RUSH	118.5	22
AGAINST PASS	227.7	22
POINTS ALLOWED	364	20
INTERCEPTIONS	12	29
SACKS	31	21t
TURNOVER DIFF.	-12	30

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		
QB	Alex Smith	Shaun Hill
FB	Moran Norris	Zak Keasey
RB	Frank Gore	DeShaun Foster
WR	Isaac Bruce	Bryant Johnson
WR	Arnaz Battle	Jason Hill
TE	Vernon Davis	Delanie Walker
LT	Joe Staley	Adam Snyder
LG	Adam Snyder	Tony Wragge
C	Eric Heitmann	David Baas
RG	David Baas	Chilo Rachal
RT	Jonas Jennings	Adam Snyder
DEFENSE		
LE	Isaac Sopoaga	Ronald Fields
NT	Aubrayo Franklin	Kentwan Balmer
RE	Justin Smith	Ray McDonald
LOLB	Manny Lawson	Jay Moore
LILB	Patrick Willis	Jeff Ulbrich
RILB	Dontarrious Thomas	Brandon Moore
ROLB	Parys Haralson	Tully Banta-Cain
LCB	Nate Clements	Shawntae Spencer
SS	Michael Lewis	Keith Lewis
FS	Mark Roman	Dashon Goldson
RCB	Walt Harris	Tarell Brown
SPECIALISTS		
K	Joe Nedney	
P	Andy Lee	
KR	Allen Rossum	
PR	Allen Rossum	
LS	Brian Jennings	

FANTASY SPIN

http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football

WILLIS SMITH HILL

Can Mike Martz bear to feature the running game and a tight end in his offense? He'll have to because his best players are Frank Gore and Vernon Davis, who were disappointments last season.

$ BUY Patrick Willis, LB

SELL Alex Smith, QB

Z SLEEPER Shaun Hill, QB

HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL

DRAFT REPORT GRADE ▸ C

The 49ers took a big gamble in the first round on DT **Kentwan Balmer**, as he is a far better athlete than football player at this point. Balmer definitely has the talent to become a very good starter (especially in the 49ers' 3-4 defense) but needs to play with more aggression to live up to his talent. **Chilo Rachal**, who came out early for the draft, may need to gain experience as a backup but has starting potential. **Reggie Smith** fell to the third round due to a poor 40-yard-dash time and is viewed by many as a cornerback/safety 'tweener. He is tough, instinctive and physical. **Cody Wallace** is an athletic but undersized center who needs to add weight in order to be more than a backup in the NFL. **Josh Morgan** is a tall and athletic receiver who is very raw running routes and must become more consistent catching the ball, while OLB **Larry Grant** has the instincts and playing speed that will make him a very good special teams player initially. Grant could develop into a starter if he bulks up.

2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
1	29	Balmer, Kentwan	DT	6-5	295	North Carolina
2	8	Rachal, Chilo	G	6-5	315	USC
3	12	Smith, Reggie	CB	6-0	196	Oklahoma
4	8	Wallace, Cody	C	6-4	294	Texas A&M
6	8	Morgan, Josh	WR	6-1	220	Virginia Tech
7	7	Grant, Larry	LB	6-3	226	Ohio State

Bruce, 35, regularly scorched the 49ers in 14 seasons with the Rams, and he remains productive late in his career. His 55 catches for 733 yards with St. Louis last year would have led the 49ers' receivers. Bruce's familiarity with Martz's system is a bonus. He has a good feel for the routes and timing Martz prefers and can pass that on to others playing in the demanding scheme for the first time. Johnson is a tough, physical wideout with good hands who never really came into his own in five seasons with Arizona, where he played in the shadow of Larry Fitzgerald and Anquan Boldin.

Perhaps the receiver with the best chance to step to the forefront is Vernon Davis, the tight end whose rare combination of speed and strength presents constant matchup problems. Arnaz Battle had 50 catches last season to lead the 49er receivers. A hard-nosed player with reliable hands, Battle stands out as a top-notch downfield blocker. Jason Hill had only one catch as a rookie last season while battling injuries, but the speedster will be given a chance to make an impact. **GRADE: C**

Offensive line A major makeover is in store for the line after a severe drop-off in effectiveness last season. Four of the five positions are in line for new players, including a swap at the tackles. Joe Staley will move to the left side after starting every game at right tackle last season. The displaced left tackle, Jonas Jennings, is slated to move to right tackle. Staley, a converted tight end, has the agility and strength to match up against today's athletic pass rushers.

Center Eric Heitmann is the only member of the line who's expected to remain in the same position. He fought back from a leg fracture in December 2006 to start every game last season. Though adept at

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE *(an opponent breaks down the 49ers)*

"What strikes me about the 49ers is their interorganizational dynamics. This could be Mike Nolan's last season. He had to talk owner John York into keeping him. He lost his personnel authority to Scot McCloughan when McCloughan was promoted to GM. That's going to be an uneasy relationship going forward. I see the 49ers as a sub-.500 team. They've got some good players. They hit on linebacker Patrick Willis last year, but they're just not very good overall. They haven't had great drafts, especially when you consider the first pick they made under Nolan was Alex Smith. That's their biggest issue, the quarterback. The guy has struggled badly almost every time he has been out there on the field. I don't think he's very good under pressure or very tough. He just misses too many throws. Their running game is solid with Frank Gore, and their offensive line is serviceable. Vernon Davis has a ton of potential. From what I saw last year, he was getting open all the time. They just didn't get the ball to him as much as they should have. You have to find ways to get him the ball. ... "

ROB HOLT / ICON SMI

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1	Arizona	SEPT. 7	4:15
WEEK 2	@ Seattle	SEPT. 14	4:05
WEEK 3	Detroit	SEPT. 21	4:05
WEEK 4	@ New Orleans	SEPT. 28	1:00
WEEK 5	New England	OCT. 5	4:15
WEEK 6	Philadelphia	OCT. 12	4:15
WEEK 7	@ New York Giants	OCT. 19	1:00
WEEK 8	Seattle	OCT. 26	4:15
WEEK 9	OPEN DATE		
WEEK 10	@ Arizona	NOV. 10	8:30
WEEK 11	St. Louis	NOV. 16	4:05
WEEK 12	@ Dallas	NOV. 23	1:00
WEEK 13	@ Buffalo	NOV. 30	1:00
WEEK 14	New York Jets	DEC. 7	4:05
WEEK 15	@ Miami	DEC. 14	1:00
WEEK 16	@ St. Louis	DEC. 21	1:00
WEEK 17	Washington	DEC. 28	4:15

SCORE

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

recognizing defensive fronts and calling out protection schemes, Heitmann needs to work on his upper-body strength to better fend off pressure coming up the middle. Adam Snyder, a powerfully built mauler who played every position except center in his first four seasons, is expected to settle in at left guard in place of Larry Allen. David Baas, another big body, will take over at right guard, provided his recovery from offseason surgery to repair a torn pectoral muscle remains on track. **GRADE: C**

DEFENSE

The additions last season of such players as cornerback Nate Clements and linebacker Patrick Willis finally allowed the 49ers to run the 3-4 scheme favored by Nolan. Defensive coordinator Greg Manusky, who begins his second year with the 49ers, has the job this season of taking that transition to the next level. He'll stress a more aggressive, opportunistic approach, emphasizing pass rushing and takeaways as a way to help the 49ers' developing offense.

Defensive line The retirement of Bryant Young and departure of Marques Douglas left the 49ers with big holes to fill on the line in the offseason. Former Cincinnati defensive end Justin Smith was signed as a free agent, and the 49ers used a first-round pick to snag North Carolina defensive tackle Kentwan Balmer. Smith will play the right side, but he may also move inside or even to a stand-up position on the outside in certain defenses. The 49ers are counting on his physical approach to enhance what has been a mediocre pass rush. Balmer is a big-bodied, run-stuffer type who figures to line up behind nose tackle Aubrayo Franklin. Look for him to play a significant role in a rotation that places a high importance on shielding linebackers from blockers in this 3-4 scheme.

Isaac Sopoaga, who split time with Franklin at nose tackle last year, is shifting to left end. His strength is taking on double teams and breaking up run-blocking schemes to allow linebackers to flow to the ball and make the play. **GRADE: B**

Linebackers Inside linebacker Willis was a phenomenal defensive force as a rookie last season, displaying remarkable speed and sideline-to-sideline range. The Defensive Rookie of the Year, Willis carries that speed to the ball, giving his tackles tremendous force and stopping power. The 49ers are looking for an inside complement to Willis. Free-agent pickup Dontarrious Thomas will compete with Jeff Ulbrich for the "Ted" linebacker, a position that is required to take on blocks more frequently en route to the ballcarrier.

Strongside linebacker Manny Lawson missed most of last season because of a torn ACL. Though his pass-rushing efforts have fallen short of expectations, Lawson has come on strong as a run defender, showing the speed and instincts to chase down ballcarriers as well as stay with tight ends in coverage. Weakside linebacker

THE BOOK ON ... FRANK GORE *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"Two years ago, he had a great season, the most productive in the 49ers' history. Getting him back to that level of play comes down to the team putting a premium on running the football. One of the things that makes him tough to stop is his deceptive speed. Coming out (of college), we had him rated as running the 40 in 4.7 seconds. But he plays much faster than that. And for all the injuries he had in college, he's shown at the NFL level that he's durable. His numbers were down last year, but that's neither here nor there because the 49ers didn't have offensive success, running or throwing. And for him to be as effective as you want him to be, you've got to be able to run it when you want to run it. He can have outstanding numbers in the passing game, and they're going to put a premium on that under offensive coordinator Mike Martz. He's got good hands and he's a decent blocker, so he'll fit right into the new scheme as far as that goes. How much he gets on the ground depends on how much they want out of him. I don't really see him as having any flaws, which makes him extremely tough to stop. He's got good balance, breaks tackles and has some wiggle."

49ERS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1 Dave Wilcox *(1964-74)*

The Intimidator gave lead blockers fits and was known for stuffing opposing tight ends at the line. He missed just one game to injury in his career.

2 Ken Norton Jr. *(1994-2000)*

The only player in NFL history to win three consecutive Super Bowls notched the third in his first season with San Francisco.

3 Patrick Willis *(2007-present)*

So it has been just one season, but Willis already has Pro Bowl and Defensive Rookie of the Year next to his name. And 174 tackles.

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/10	W	20-17	Arizona Cardinals
09/16	W	17-16	at St. Louis Rams
09/23	L	16-37	at Pittsburgh Steelers
09/30	L	3-23	Seattle Seahawks
10/07	L	7-9	Baltimore Ravens
10/21	L	15-33	at New York Giants
10/28	L	10-31	New Orleans Saints
11/04	L	16-20	at Atlanta Falcons
11/12	L	0-24	at Seattle Seahawks
11/18	L	9-13	St. Louis Rams
11/25	W	37-31	at Arizona Cardinals
12/02	L	14-31	at Carolina Panthers
12/09	L	7-27	Minnesota Vikings
12/15	W	20-13	Cincinnati Bengals
12/23	W	21-19	Tampa Bay Buccaneers
12/30	L	7-20	at Cleveland Browns

WON 5, LOST 11

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Gore	260	1102	4.2	43t	5
Robinson	26	121	4.7	28	0
Hicks	21	117	5.6	18	1
Smith	13	89	6.8	25	0
Dilfer	10	25	2.5	11	0
Norris	7	17	2.4	6	0
Hill	12	14	1.2	12	1
Battle	4	4	1.0	8	1
Keasey	2	4	2.0	3	0
Gilmore	1	-8	-8.0	-8	0
Jacobs	1	-8	-8.0	-8	0
49ERS	**357**	**1477**	**4.1**	**43t**	**8**
OPPONENTS	504	1896	3.8	84t	9

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Gore	53	436	8.2	23t	1
Davis	52	509	9.8	31	4
Battle	50	600	12.0	57t	5
Jackson	46	497	10.8	34	3
Walker	21	174	8.3	26	1
Hicks	14	86	6.1	11	0
Robinson	11	73	6.6	20	0
Lelie	10	115	11.5	47	0
Gilmore	7	111	15.9	42	0
Norris	6	38	6.3	13	0
Jacobs	3	40	13.3	21t	1
Hill	1	6	6.0	6	0
49ERS	**274**	**2685**	**9.8**	**57t**	**15**
OPPONENTS	345	3826	11.1	65	24

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Dilfer	219	113	1166	7	12
Smith	193	94	914	2	4
Hill	79	54	501	5	1
Weinke	22	13	104	1	0
49ERS	**513**	**274**	**2685**	**15**	**17**
OPPONENTS	543	345	3826	24	12

SACKS 49ERS 31, OPPONENTS 55

Young 6.5, Willis 4, Banta-Cain 3.5, Douglas 3, Haralson 2.5, Moore 2.5, Green 2, Lewis 1.5, Sopoaga 1.5, Clements 1, Fields 1, McDonald 1, Navies 1

ALBERT DICKSON / SN

Tully Banta-Cain added little to the 49ers' pass rush after being added as a free agent a year ago and faces competition from Parys Haralson to hang on to his job. **GRADE: B+**

Secondary » A year ago, the 49ers made Clements the league's highest-paid defensive player. He didn't exactly make a big splash in terms of measurable statistics, but his presence has solidified a secondary that not so long ago was the team's biggest weakness. Clements' ability to cover the opposition's best receivers on a weekly basis gives Manusky greater flexibility in his play-calling. He is a tremendous competitor and plays to the whistle, giving him the chance to break up a play with a punch at the ball even after a receiver might make the catch. He also possesses the mental toughness to shake off being beaten and go toe-to-toe with that same receiver on the next play.

Opposite Clements is cornerback Walt Harris, who remains a crafty, tenacious cover man. But he turns 34 in August and seemed more susceptible to receivers' double moves last season. He could face competition for playing time from Shawntae Spencer, whose biggest problem has been a tendency to play receivers too soft. Markus Curry, Tarell Brown and Reggie Smith, a third-round draft pick from Oklahoma, add depth.

Michael Lewis returns as strong safety, giving the 49ers an imposing physical presence in the secondary. At free safety, Mark Roman is solid. **GRADE: B+**

SPECIAL TEAMS

The 49ers have one of the league's top kicking tandems in placekicker Joe Nedney and punter Andy Lee, who earned his first Pro Bowl appearance last season.

Nedney was exceptionally consistent, converting 17 of 19 field goals. His only two misses of the season were from beyond 50 yards. Nedney also leads active kickers with 10 career successful onside kicks, including seven in three seasons with the 49ers. Lee is equally adept at booming punts or making directional kicks. He placed 42 punts inside the opposition's 20-yard line last year, an NFL record. He also had an NFL high of 49 punts of 50 or more yards, including a dozen of at least 60.

Long snapper Brian Jennings gets the ball back for the kickers quickly and accurately pretty much without fail. The coverage units were also among the most effective in the league. If there was a weakness in the special teams, it was the lack of production in the return game. To try to remedy that, the 49ers signed return specialist Allen Rossum as a free agent. **GRADE: A-**

BOTTOM LINE

After three consecutive losing seasons, it's a make-or-break year for Nolan. That much became clear when owner York spared Nolan's job but passed on extending his contract, which expires in 2009. Though Nolan has assembled a defense that may well be good enough to win, it needs more support from the wobbly offense.

While Nolan brought in Martz to try to get the offense and Smith back on track, that may go for naught. The 49ers have not committed sufficient resources to acquiring the skilled playmakers central to supporting whoever turns out to be the team's quarterback and turning around their offense.

That failure points to another mediocre season for a once-proud franchise.

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FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT

STEADY

ROSTER

#	QUARTERBACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
13	Hill, Shaun	QB	6-3	235	01/09/1980	2	Maryland
14	O'Sullivan, J.T.	QB	6-2	227	08/25/1979	2	California-Davis
7	Olson, Drew	QB	6-3	225	04/06/1983	0	UCLA
11	Smith, Alex	QB	6-4	210	05/07/1984	3	Utah

#	OFFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
64	Baas, David	G	6-4	331	09/28/1981	3	Michigan
66	Heitmann, Eric	G	6-3	318	02/24/1980	6	Stanford
75	Jennings, Jonas	T	6-3	332	11/21/1977	7	Georgia
61	Mitchell, Qasim	T	6-6	355	12/03/1979	3	North Carolina A&T
68	Snyder, Adam	G	6-6	326	01/30/1982	3	Oregon
74	Staley, Joe	T	6-5	306	08/30/1984	1	Central Michigan
77	Terry, Jeb	G	6-5	311	04/10/1981	3	North Carolina
69	Wragge, Tony	G	6-4	320	08/14/1979	3	New Mexico State

#	RUNNING BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
33	Clayton, Thomas	RB	5-11	225	04/26/1984	0	Kansas State
29	Foster, DeShaun	RB	6-0	222	01/10/1980	5	UCLA
21	Gore, Frank	RB	5-9	223	05/14/1983	3	Miami (FL)
45	Keasey, Zak	RB	6-0	245	03/19/1982	2	Princeton
44	Norris, Moran	RB	6-1	252	06/16/1978	7	Kansas
24	Robinson, Michael	RB	6-1	218	02/06/1983	2	Penn State

#	RECEIVERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
47	Bajema, Billy	TE	6-4	255	10/31/1982	3	Oklahoma State
83	Battle, Arnaz	WR	6-1	213	02/22/1980	5	Notre Dame
88	Bruce, Isaac	WR	6-0	188	11/10/1972	14	Memphis
85	Davis, Vernon	TE	6-3	253	01/31/1984	2	Maryland
89	Hill, Jason	WR	6-0	204	01/25/1985	1	Washington State
86	Jennings, Brian	TE	6-5	228	10/14/1976	8	Arizona State
82	Johnson, Bryant	WR	6-3	216	03/07/1981	5	Penn State
18	Lelie, Ashley	WR	6-3	193	02/16/1980	6	Hawaii
19	Rabb, Jerard	WR	6-2	201	08/19/1984	0	Boise State
46	Walker, Delanie	TE	6-0	244	08/12/1984	2	Central Missouri State
48	Wallace, Cooper	TE	6-3	258	04/26/1982	1	Auburn
17	Zeigler, Dominique	WR	6-2	181	10/11/1984	0	Baylor

#	DEFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
76	Cohen, Joe	DT	6-2	296	06/06/1984	0	Florida
70	Curry, Walter	DT	6-4	241	06/18/1981	0	Albany State (GA)
63	Duckett, Damane	DT	6-6	318	01/21/1981	3	East Carolina
78	Ellison, Atiyyah	DT	6-3	318	09/29/1981	0	Missouri
93	Fields, Ronald	DT	6-2	321	09/13/1981	3	Mississippi State
92	Franklin, Aubrayo	DT	6-1	334	08/27/1980	5	Tennessee
91	McDonald, Ray	DE	6-3	280	09/02/1984	1	Florida
58	Moore, Jay	DE	6-4	280	08/16/1983	0	Nebraska
96	Oliver, Melvin	DE	6-3	279	07/25/1983	1	LSU
94	Smith, Justin	DE	6-4	275	09/30/1979	7	Missouri
90	Sopoaga, Isaac	DT	6-2	325	09/04/1981	3	Hawaii

#	DEFENSIVE BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
25	Brown, Tarell	CB	5-10	194	01/06/1985	1	Texas
22	Clements, Nate	CB	6-0	215	12/12/1979	7	Ohio State
40	Curry, Markus	CB	5-11	181	04/07/1981	1	Michigan
38	Goldson, Dashon	S	6-2	208	09/18/1984	1	Washington
27	Harris, Walt	CB	5-11	199	08/10/1974	12	Mississippi State
23	Hudson, Marcus	CB	6-2	200	11/15/1982	2	North Carolina State
28	Lewis, Keith	S	6-0	228	10/20/1981	4	Oregon
32	Lewis, Michael	S	6-1	226	04/29/1980	6	Colorado
26	Roman, Mark	S	5-11	201	03/26/1977	8	LSU
20	Rossum, Allen	CB	5-8	178	10/22/1975	10	Notre Dame
36	Spencer, Shawntae	CB	6-1	179	02/22/1982	4	Pittsburgh
30	Strickland, Donald	CB	5-10	187	11/24/1980	5	Colorado

#	LINEBACKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
95	Banta-Cain, Tully	LB	6-2	280	08/28/1980	5	California
54	Green, Roderick	LB	6-2	274	04/26/1982	4	Central Missouri State
58	Haley, Dennis	LB	6-1	247	02/18/1982	3	Virginia
98	Haralson, Parys	LB	6-0	260	01/24/1984	2	Tennessee
99	Lawson, Manny	LB	6-5	247	07/03/1984	2	North Carolina State
56	Moore, Brandon	LB	6-1	255	01/16/1979	6	Oklahoma
51	Thomas, Dontarrious	LB	6-2	241	09/02/1980	4	Auburn
53	Ulbrich, Jeff	LB	6-0	246	02/17/1977	8	Hawaii
52	Willis, Patrick	LB	6-1	240	01/25/1985	1	Mississippi

#	KICKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
4	Lee, Andy	P	6-0	183	08/11/1982	4	Pittsburgh
6	Nedney, Joe	K	6-5	235	03/22/1973	11	San Jose State

▶ **MIKE NOLAN,** *Head coach*

Mike Martz, off. coord.; **Greg Manusky**, def. coord.; **Al Everest**, special teams coord.; **Mike Singletary**, asst. head coach/defense; **Ted Tollner**, quarterbacks; **Pete Hoener**, tight ends; **Vance Joseph**, secondary; **Johnnie Lynn**, secondary; **Jerry Sullivan**, wide receivers/senior asst.; **Jason Tarver**, def. asst./outside linebackers; **Dave Fipp**, asst. specials team; **Tony Nathan**, running backs; **Chris Foerster**, off. line; **George Warhop**, off. line; **Jim Tomsula**, def. line

SEATTLE SEAHAWKS

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE

(an opponent breaks down the Seahawks)

"This team is well-coached, extremely tough at home, can score points and has an opportunistic defense. They are a little bit undersized on defense, but they read-and-react well, have above-average players at middle linebacker (Lofa Tatupu), defensive end (Patrick Kerney) and corner (Marcus Trufant) and got smarter at safety last season with the additions of Deon Grant and Brian Russell. They have gotten more aggressive on defense, with their man-to-man coverage and blitz schemes, and that provides opportunities for big plays. The offense remains productive, but it's starting to get old at key positions. The lack of a reliable short-yardage back has hurt the offense, and not just last season. Depth at wide receiver also is an issue, especially since their best receiver and security blanket (Bobby Engram) is 35. ...

"This team also doesn't travel well to the East Coast, and that's a big factor again this season because they go east four times in their first nine games."

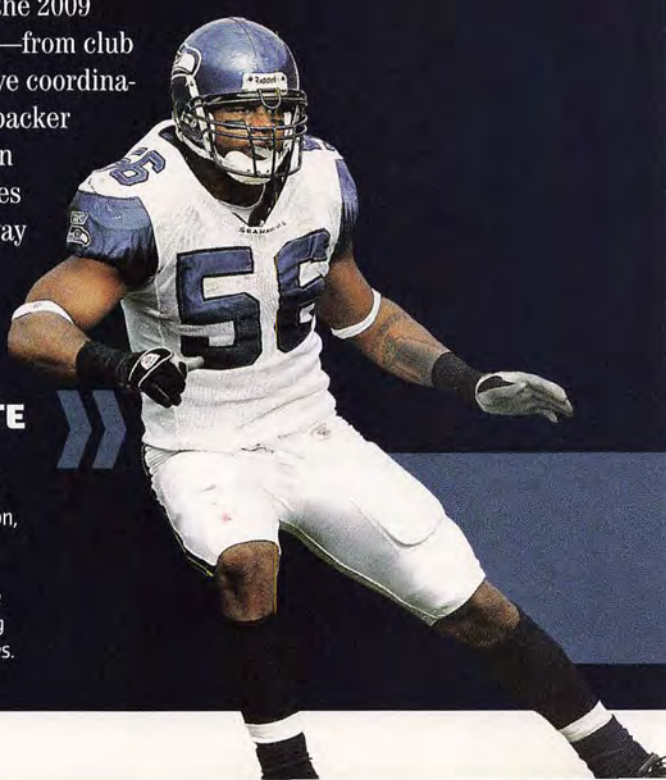
Expect Holmgren to go out on a successful, if not spectacular, note

By Clare Farnsworth, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*

So, what kind of retirement gift do you get for the coach who seemingly has everything?

Mike Holmgren is entering his 10th—and final—season as coach of the Seattle Seahawks. His tenure has produced unprecedented success for a franchise that had captured only one division title, won three playoff games and posted winning records just eight times in its first 23 seasons. Under Holmgren, it has been five division titles, four postseason victories, seven winning records and the Seahawks' only appearance in the Super Bowl.

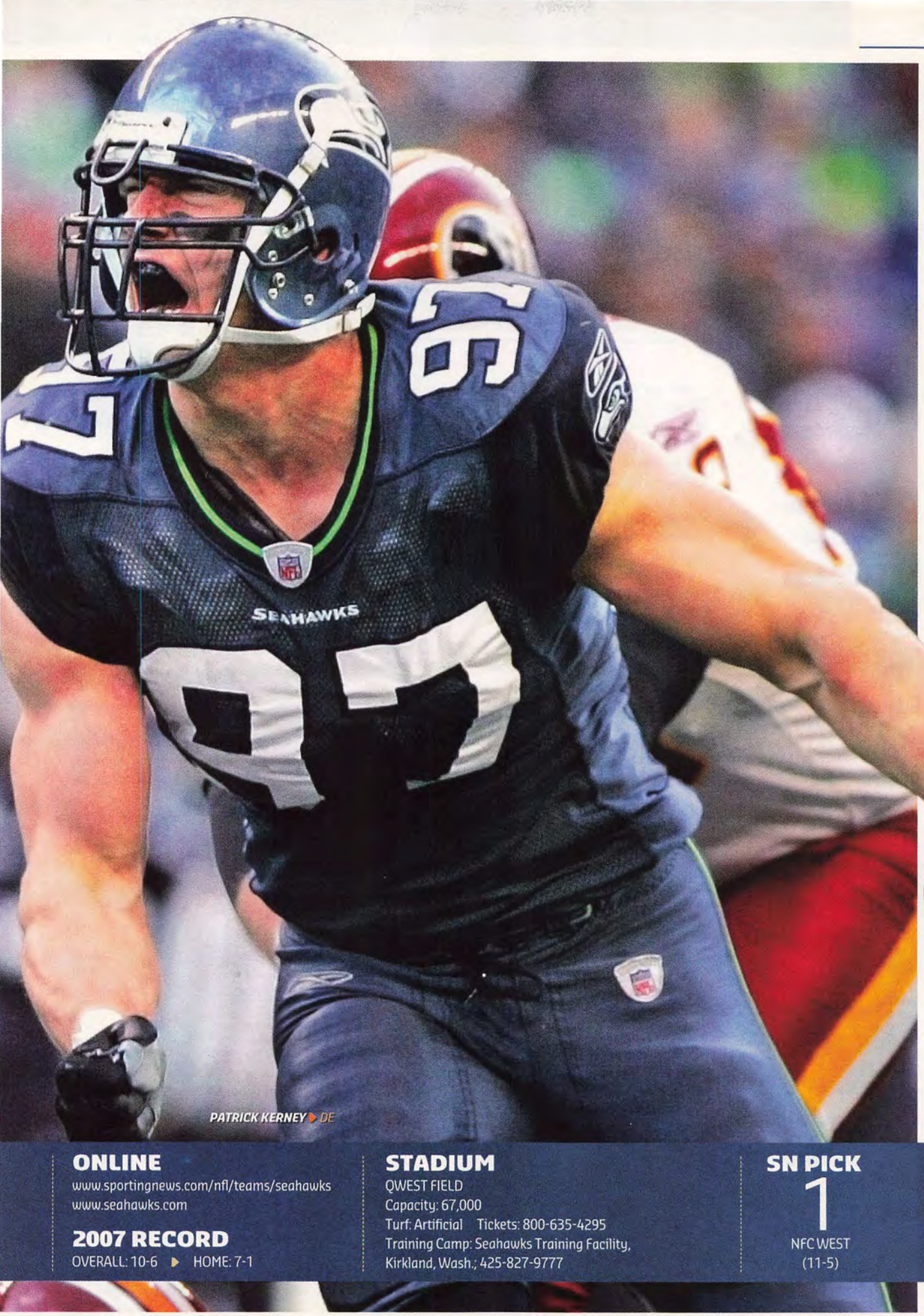
Secondary coach Jim Mora Jr. has already been named Holmgren's successor for the 2009 season. But the focus this season—from club president Tim Ruskell, to defensive coordinator John Marshall, to middle linebacker Lofa Tatupu, to Mora—remains on what the players and other coaches can do to send Holmgren on his way in style.



BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

LEROY HILL ▶ LB

The Seahawks' other linebacker has been a starter since midway through his rookie season, but has also been playing in the Pro Bowl shadows of Julian Peterson and Lofa Tatupu. The coaches need to find ways to better utilize Hill's ability to blitz, which begins with keeping him on the field in the nickel and dime defenses.



PATRICK KERNEY ▶ DE

ONLINE

www.sportingnews.com/nfl/teams/seahawks
www.seahawks.com

2007 RECORD

OVERALL: 10-6 ▶ HOME: 7-1

STADIUM

QWEST FIELD
Capacity: 67,000
Turf: Artificial Tickets: 800-635-4295
Training Camp: Seahawks Training Facility, Kirkland, Wash.; 425-827-9777

SN PICK

1

NFC WEST
(11-5)

OPPOSITE: JOE ROBBINS / GETTY IMAGES; JAY DROWNS / SN

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 @ Buffalo
SEPT. 7 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 2 San Francisco
SEPT. 14 | 4:05
— SCORE

WEEK 3 St. Louis
SEPT. 21 | 4:05
— SCORE

WEEK 4 *OPEN DATE*

WEEK 5 @ New York Giants
OCT. 5 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 6 Green Bay
OCT. 12 | 4:15
— SCORE

WEEK 7 @ Tampa Bay
OCT. 19 | 8:15
— SCORE

WEEK 8 @ San Francisco
OCT. 26 | 4:15
— SCORE

WEEK 9 Philadelphia
NOV. 2 | 4:15
— SCORE

WEEK 10 @ Miami
NOV. 9 | 1:00
— SCORE

WEEK 11 Arizona
NOV. 16 | 4:05
— SCORE

WEEK 12 Washington
NOV. 23 | 4:15
— SCORE

WEEK 13 @ Dallas
NOV. 27 | 4:15
— SCORE

WEEK 14 New England
DEC. 7 | 8:15
— SCORE

WEEK 15 @ St. Louis
DEC. 14 | 1:00
— SCORE

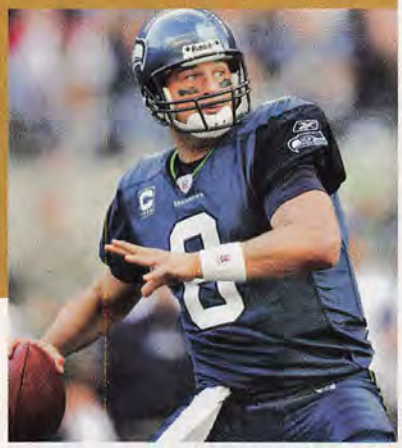
WEEK 16 New York Jets
DEC. 21 | 4:05
— SCORE

WEEK 17 @ Arizona
DEC. 28 | 4:15
— SCORE

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

THE BOOK ON ... MATT HASSELBECK *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"Hasselbeck has the size, arm strength and athletic ability that are prerequisites to playing the position. But it's his accuracy on the intermediate routes—even when he can't set his feet and has to throw off balance and adjust in the pocket—that make him so effective in their system. Hasselbeck has improved on making his pre-snap reads and the adjustments at the line that come with them. He also sees the entire field and can make plays with his legs when forced out of the pocket. Last year, he showed a lot by carrying the offense when the running game broke down. But he has a tendency to lock on to receivers on deeper throws and wait for them to come open, and that can be a problem. Also—and this goes for any quarterback in a West Coast offense— pressure up the middle on the three- and five-step drops really disrupts the rhythm of the scheme and can cause problems."



JAY DROWNS / SN

But the Seahawks are a team in transition, and not just because this will be Holmgren's swan song. The defense has become the strength of this team, and most of the question marks revolve around an offense that has fallen on less-productive times since its near-precision performance in the Seahawks' run to the Super Bowl in 2005.

Seattle hasn't just won four consecutive NFC West titles, it has dominated the division. None of the other three teams has even been able to post a winning record during this stretch. A repeat performance, at the very least, would be a fitting farewell for Holmgren.

OFFENSE

Holmgren's hybrid is the closest thing left in the league to the old West Coast offense that served the San Francisco 49ers so well under Bill Walsh and helped Holmgren return the Green Bay Packers to prominence before coming to Seattle. Holmgren and offensive coordinator Gil Haskell still prefer a 60-40 pass/run ratio, but they also expect the Seahawks to run the ball with more authority and consistency because of the offseason changes that have been made.

Quarterbacks Matt Hasselbeck won over more than just a few detractors last season, and his performance after Holmgren put the fate of the offense in his hands showed that the former sixth-round draft choice from Boston College has arrived.

With the ground game running on empty—and despite having his starting wide receivers on the field together for only one full game because of injuries—Holmgren leaned heavily on his hand-picked passer, and Hasselbeck responded with franchise records for completions (352) and passing yards (3,966) and also threw a career-high 28 touchdown passes. Hasselbeck possesses the arm strength and command of the offense to make the right throw, to the right receiver, at the right time. Like a streak shooter in basketball, he also has the ability to take over a game as he feeds off his own success. But Hasselbeck also gets himself into trouble when he tries to do too much, which includes throwing the ball into coverage or holding it too long while trying to force a play.

The backups remain Seneca Wallace, who is still a better athlete than quarterback at this stage of his career, and Charlie Frye, the former Browns starter who was obtained in a trade last season. **GRADE: B-**

5-YEAR WINS TREND

NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	348.9	9
RUSHING	101.2	20
PASSING	247.8	8
SCORING	393	9t
PUNT RETURNS	11.3	5
KICK RETURNS	22.1	20
RED ZONE TD %	57.1	8
TOTAL DEFENSE	321.8	15
AGAINST RUSH	102.8	12
AGAINST PASS	219.1	19
POINTS ALLOWED	291	6t
INTERCEPTIONS	20	4t
SACKS	45	4
TURNOVER DIFF.	+10	5

Running backs Last year, club president Ruskell rebuilt a sagging secondary that was the culprit in at least three losses in 2006. This year, the area that has been remodeled is the backfield, which became a lightning rod for a running game that lacked punch and production in 2007.

While Shaun Alexander's prodigiously productive five-year run came to a halt when injuries eroded his effectiveness the past two seasons,

his tenure with the Seahawks was terminated even more abruptly when he was released in April. The club had taken steps to replace him by signing the dash-and-bash duo of Julius Jones and T.J. Duckett in free agency. Jones, a former starter for the Cowboys, will compete with incumbent backup Maurice Morris for the same role with the Seahawks. Each back is quicker than Alexander and hits the hole with more urgency. Duckett is expected to provide a bigger option in short-yardage and goal-line situations.

Leonard Weaver took over as the fullback last season after a neck injury forced Mack Strong to retire. While Weaver produced more rushing and receiving yards than any Seahawk fullback since John L. Williams in 1991, he needs to improve his blocking. **GRADE: C**

Receivers » Can the Seahawks milk one more season from the 35-year-old body of Bobby Engram? All he did in 2007 was set a franchise record with 94 receptions and produce the first 1,000-yard season of his 12-year NFL career. A fluke? Hardly. Who was the team's leading receiver during its Super Bowl run in 2005? You guessed it: Engram.

When it comes to who else will be catching Hasselbeck's passes this season, it's an open question. Flanker Deion Branch is recovering from tearing a ligament in his left knee during the playoff loss to the Packers in Green Bay and could begin the season on the injured list. Split end D.J. Hackett signed with the Carolina Panthers in free agency after injuries limited him to six games last season. Nate Burleson was much more productive in 2007 while subbing for Hackett, but is still not as consistent as he needs to be.

Tight end? Don't even go there. The team did select Notre Dame's John Carlson in the second round of the draft, but Holmgren is the first to point out that it is difficult for a rookie to play the position in his offense because he asks the tight end to do so much. Carlson, however, has the size to be a blocker, plus the hands and route-running ability to be factor in the passing game.

Youth will also have to be more than just serviceable at wide receiver, as the coaches look to the untested foursome of Courtney Taylor, Ben Obomanu, Logan Payne and Jordan Kent to help fill the void created by Branch's injury and Hackett's departure.

All of this brings us back to Engram, the slippery, savvy slot receiver who remains the best option in the Seahawks' passing game. **GRADE: C+**

Offensive line » The Seahawks averaged 101.2 rushing yards per game and 3.8 yards per carry last season, the lowest numbers since Holmgren's first season

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

	OFFENSE	
QB	Matt Hasselbeck	Seneca Wallace
FB	Leonard Weaver	T.J. Duckett
RB	Julius Jones	Maurice Morris
WR	Nate Burleson	Courtney Taylor
WR	Bobby Engram	Ben Obomanu
TE	John Carlson	Will Heller
LT	Walter Jones	Floyd Womack
LG	Mike Wahle	Mansfield Wrotto
C	Chris Spencer	Chris Gray
RG	Rob Sims	Chris Gray
RT	Sean Locklear	Ray Willis

	DEFENSE	
LE	Patrick Kerney	Baraka Atkins
DT	Rocky Bernard	Craig Terrill
DT	Brandon Mebane	Red Bryant
RE	Lawrence Jackson	Darryl Tapp
OLB	Leroy Hill	Lance Laury
MLB	Lofa Tatupu	D.D. Lewis
OLB	Julian Peterson	Will Herring
LCB	Marcus Trufant	Jordan Babineaux
SS	Deon Grant	Mike Green
FS	Brian Russell	Jordan Babineaux
RCB	Kelly Jennings	Josh Wilson

	SPECIALISTS	
K	Olindo Mare	
P	Ryan Plackemeier	
KR	Nate Burleson	
PR	Nate Burleson	
LS	Tyler Schmitt	

SEAHAWKS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1 Lofa Tatupu *(2005-present)*

With three Pro Bowls in his first three seasons, he has brought stability to a spot in which coach Mike Holmgren burned through six starters in his first six seasons in Seattle.

2 Julian Peterson *(2006-present)*

There just aren't a lot of linebackers in the league with his diversity of talents, and the Seahawks' schemes have allowed him to display them all.

3 Chad Brown *(1997-2004)*

He led the team in tackles for three consecutive seasons (1997-99) and went to the Pro Bowl twice by routinely making plays that seemed improbable.

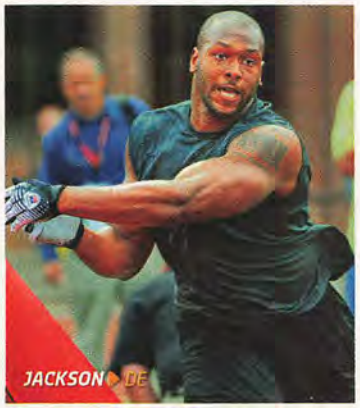
KIRBY LEE / US PRESSWIRE

» DRAFT REPORT GRADE ▸ C-

The Seahawks surprised many by grabbing a defensive end in the first round, considering they have two solid starters in Patrick Kerney and Darryl Tapp, but the value of **Lawrence Jackson** was too good to pass up. Jackson is well built with very good technique and the athleticism to consistently pressure the quarterback and be very productive against the run. Look for him to make an immediate impact at defensive end. The Seahawks seemed to reach a little when they selected TE **John Carlson**, who has excellent hands but lacks the quickness, speed and burst to make big plays downfield and is an average blocker at best. Defensive tackle **Red Bryant** is a massive player who has the talent to be a productive starter if he learns to play with better leverage and use his hands more aggressively. **Owen Schmitt** is a classic old-school fullback who will bull a defender out of the play when blocking and has good hands catching the ball out of the backfield. Don't be surprised if he starts as a rookie. **Tyler Schmitt** is a good long snapper who should immediately compete for the starting job. **Justin Forsett** fell down draft boards due to a terrible combination of a lack of height and elite speed. He should be a productive backup running back when he gets the ball in his hands, however. Kicker **Brandon Coutu** will be in the mix for the starting job, but will need to prove he has the leg strength on kickoffs.

» 2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
1	28	Jackson, Lawrence	DE	6-5	270	USC
2	7	Carlson, John	TE	6-6	255	Notre Dame
4	22	Bryant, Red	DT	6-5	328	Texas A&M
5	28	Schmitt, Owen	RB	6-2	250	West Virginia
6	23	Schmitt, Tyler	LS	6-2	234	San Diego State
7	26	Forsett, Justin	RB	5-8	190	California
7	28	Coutu, Brandon	K	5-11	187	Georgia



ROSTER

#	QUARTERBACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
5	Frye, Charlie	QB	6-4	218	08/28/1981	3	Akron
4	Bell, Dalton	QB	6-3	210	03/09/1983	1	West Texas A&M
8	Hasselbeck, Matt	QB	6-4	225	09/25/1975	9	Boston College
15	Wallace, Seneca	QB	5-11	205	08/06/1980	3	Iowa State

#	OFFENSIVE LINE	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
68	Ashworth, Tom	T	6-6	306	10/10/1977	6	Colorado
62	Gray, Chris	G	6-4	305	06/19/1970	15	Auburn
71	Jones, Walter	T	6-5	325	01/19/1974	11	Florida State
75	Locklear, Sean	T	6-4	308	05/29/1981	4	North Carolina State
67	Sims, Rob	G	6-3	312	12/06/1983	2	Ohio State
65	Spencer, Chris	C	6-3	312	03/28/1982	3	Mississippi
69	Vallos, Steve	G	6-3	312	12/28/1983	0	Wake Forest
68	Wahle, Mike	G	6-6	304	03/29/1977	10	Navy
78	Williams, Kyle	T	6-6	295	03/19/1984	0	USC
74	Willis, Ray	T	6-6	315	08/13/1982	3	Florida State
77	Womack, Floyd	T	6-4	328	11/15/1978	8	Mississippi State
66	Wrotto, Mansfield	G	6-3	320	10/12/1984	0	Georgia Tech

#	RUNNING BACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
	Duckett, T.J.	RB	6-0	254	02/17/1981	6	Michigan State
22	Jones, Julius	RB	5-10	211	08/14/1981	4	Notre Dame
34	Kirtman, David	RB	6-0	238	02/12/1983	1	USC
20	Morris, Maurice	RB	5-11	216	12/01/1979	6	Oregon
43	Weaver, Leonard	RB	6-0	242	09/23/1982	2	Carson-Newman

#	RECEIVERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
47	Alcorn, Zac	TE	6-4	255	08/24/1980	1	Black Hills State
83	Branch, Deion	WR	5-9	192	07/18/1979	6	Louisville
81	Burleson, Nate	WR	6-0	198	08/19/1981	5	Nevada
84	Engram, Bobby	WR	5-10	192	01/07/1973	12	Penn State
85	Heller, Will	TE	6-6	270	02/28/1981	5	Georgia Tech
82	Kent, Jordan	WR	6-4	219	07/24/1984	0	Oregon
46	Newton, Joe	TE	6-7	258	10/15/1983	0	Oregon State
87	Obomanu, Ben	WR	6-0	206	10/30/1983	1	Auburn
19	Payne, Logan	WR	6-2	205	01/21/1985	0	Minnesota
88	Putzier, Jeb	TE	6-4	256	01/20/1979	6	Boise State
86	Taylor, Courtney	WR	6-1	205	04/07/1984	1	Auburn

#	DEFENSIVE LINE	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
98	Atkins, Baraka	DE	6-4	268	08/28/1984	1	Miami (FL)
52	Babin, Jason	DE	6-2	267	05/24/1980	4	Western Michigan
99	Bernard, Rocky	DT	6-3	308	04/19/1979	6	Texas A&M
91	Cooper, Chris	DE	6-5	280	12/27/1977	6	Nebraska-Omaha
94	Green, Howard	DT	6-2	320	01/12/1979	4	LSU
97	Kerney, Patrick	DE	6-5	272	12/30/1976	9	Virginia
92	Mebane, Brandon	DT	6-1	314	01/15/1985	1	California
72	Tafisi, Nu'u	DE	6-2	268	06/30/1981	0	California
69	Talavou, Kelly	DT	6-2	334	10/04/1984	0	Utah
55	Tapp, Darryl	DE	6-1	270	09/13/1984	2	Virginia Tech
93	Terrill, Craig	DT	6-2	295	06/27/1980	4	Purdue
96	Tripplett, Larry	DT	6-2	296	01/18/1979	7	Washington
90	Tubbs, Marcus	DT	6-3	318	05/16/1981	3	Texas

#	DEFENSIVE BACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
27	Babineaux, Jordan	S	6-0	206	08/31/1982	4	Southern Arkansas
29	Dada, Omowale	CB	5-11	194	05/31/1983	0	Washington State
24	Grant, Deon	S	6-2	215	03/14/1979	7	Tennessee
42	Green, Mike	S	6-0	200	12/06/1976	7	Northwestern State
32	Hobbs, Kevin	CB	6-0	188	04/30/1983	1	Auburn
21	Jennings, Kelly	CB	5-11	180	11/30/1982	2	Miami (FL)
31	Lowe, Omare	S	6-1	195	04/20/1978	5	Washington
25	Russell, Brian	S	6-2	210	02/05/1978	6	San Diego State
23	Trufant, Marcus	CB	5-11	197	12/25/1980	5	Washington State
39	Wallace, C.J.	S	6-0	218	04/17/1985	1	Washington
26	Wilson, Josh	CB	5-9	192	03/11/1985	1	Maryland

#	LINEBACKERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
54	Herring, Will	LB	6-3	235	08/28/1983	1	Auburn
56	Hill, Leroy	LB	6-1	238	09/14/1982	3	Clemson
50	Laury, Lance	LB	6-2	237	01/17/1982	2	South Carolina
58	Lewis, D.D.	LB	6-1	241	01/08/1979	5	Texas
53	Mallard, Wesly	LB	6-1	230	11/21/1978	6	Oregon
59	Peterson, Julian	LB	6-3	240	07/28/1978	8	Michigan State
51	Tatupu, Lofa	LB	6-0	242	11/15/1982	3	USC

#	KICKERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
3	Hodges, Reggie	P	6-0	226	04/18/1984	1	Ball State
10	Mare, Olindo	K	5-11	190	06/06/1973	11	Syracuse
1	Plackemeier, Ryan	P	6-3	247	03/05/1984	2	Wake Forest

▶ **MIKE HOLMGREN,** *Head coach*

Gil Haskell, asst. head coach/off. coord.; **John Marshall**, def. coord.; **Mike DeBord**, asst. off. line; **Kasey Dunn**, running backs; **Jim Lind**, tight ends; **Keith Gilbertson**, wide receivers; **Bill Lazor**, quarterbacks; **Mike Solari**, off. line; **Dwaine Board**, def. line; **Jim Mora**, asst. head coach/secondary; **Larry Marmie**, def. asst./secondary; **Zerick Rollins**, linebackers; **Bruce DeHaven**, special teams; **John Jamison**, special teams asst.

in 1999. Obviously, something had to be done. So the Seahawks did a lot, starting with hiring Mike Solari to coach a unit that lacked tenacity and cohesiveness in 2007. Solari teaches and stresses technique, which will help center Chris Spencer and guard Rob Sims, who struggled in their first full seasons as starters. Solari's lines in Kansas City also played with aggression and toughness, which the Seahawks lost with the free-agent departure of Pro Bowl left guard Steve Hutchinson in 2006 and the retirement of Pro Bowl center Robbie Tobeck after the '06 season.

To fill what has become a sore spot at left guard, former Pro Bowler Mike Wahle was signed after being released by the Carolina Panthers. That will leave Sims to battle it out with incumbent Chris Gray and promising, but untested, Ray Willis at right guard. In what was another step in the right direction, right tackle Sean Locklear was re-signed before he could become an unrestricted free agent.

The strength of this unit is obvious: Pro Bowl left tackle Walter Jones. But even his effectiveness was eroded last season by a shoulder injury that prevented him from practicing, and he needed offseason surgery to correct it. Even at 90 percent, Jones was better than 90 percent of the left tackles in the game.

The additions of Solari and Wahle should pump some new life into Jones' Hall-of-Fame career as he enters his 12th season. **GRADE: C+**

DEFENSE

The Seahawks use speed, quickness and pursuit to offset the fact that they are an undersized defense, and defensive coordinator Marshall amplifies these attributes with an aggressive scheme. When playing at home—on the fast surface at Qwest Field and in front of the noise machine that is their "12th Man"—the Seahawks are capable of throttling opponents. But when forced to play on the road, especially in adverse conditions, their speed and quickness can be negated.

Defensive line » Better consistency is the key element in this unit's development this season. The Seahawks had 45 sacks in 2007 to rank fourth in the league. But 40 of them came in the team's 10 wins and 29 in the eight home games. This disparity also carried over to the players producing those sacks. Relentless ends Patrick Kerney (14.5 sacks) and Darryl Tapp (7) and pass-rushing linebacker Julian Peterson (9.5) combined for 31 of the team's sacks. But Kerney had nine in one four-game stretch, while Peterson produced five

OFFSEASON MOVES

ADDITIONS:

OG **Mike Wahle** (FA/Panthers), TE **Jeb Putzier** (FA/Texans), RB **T.J. Duckett** (Lions), RB **Julius Jones** (FA/Cowboys), LB **D.D. Lewis** (FA/Broncos), DE **Chris Cooper** (FA/Cardinals), K **Olindo Mare** (FA/Saints)

SUBTRACTIONS:

RB **Shaun Alexander** (FA), RB **Alvin Pearman** (FA), TE **Bennie Joppru** (FA), LS **Jeff Robinson** (FA), TE **Marcus Pollard** (FA/Patriots), K **Josh Brown** (FA/Rams), LB **Niko Koutouvides** (FA/Broncos), WR **D.J. Hackett** (FA/Panthers), DE **Ellis Wyms** (FA/Vikings), DT **Chartric Darby** (FA/Lions), LB **Kevin Bentley** (FA/Texans), RB **Josh Scobey** (FA)

INSIDE THE HEADSET

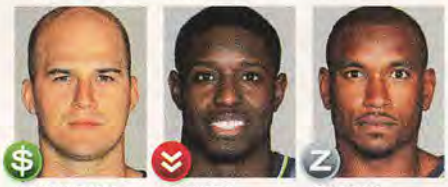
HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL

MIKE HOLMGREN

To say that Holmgren believes in his system does not even scratch the surface of just how dedicated he is to his hybrid of the old West Coast offense. There are new wrinkles each season, but he has not altered his basic philosophy that it's easier to complete a 6-yard pass than break a 6-yard run.

FANTASY SPIN

http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football



HASSELBECK BRANCH ENGRAM

The Seahawks cut Shaun Alexander and signed Julius Jones in the offseason. Does that mean Jones finally will be a reliable every-down back? No. He lacks size and breakaway speed.

$ BUY Matt Hasselbeck, QB

SELL Deion Branch, WR

Z SLEEPER Bobby Engram, WR

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/09	W	20-6	Tampa Bay Buccaneers
09/16	L	20-23	at Arizona Cardinals
09/23	W	24-21	Cincinnati Bengals
09/30	W	23-3	at San Francisco 49ers
10/07	L	0-21	at Pittsburgh Steelers
10/14	L	17-28	New Orleans Saints
10/21	W	33-6	St. Louis Rams
11/04	L	30-33	at Cleveland Browns
11/12	W	24-0	San Francisco 49ers
11/18	W	30-23	Chicago Bears
11/25	W	24-19	at St. Louis Rams
12/02	W	28-24	at Philadelphia Eagles
12/09	W	42-21	Arizona Cardinals
12/16	L	10-13	at Carolina Panthers
12/23	W	27-6	Baltimore Ravens
12/30	L	41-44	at Atlanta Falcons

WON 10, LOST 6

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Alexander	207	716	3.5	25	4
Morris	140	628	4.5	46	4
Weaver	33	146	4.4	37	1
Hasselbeck	39	89	2.3	12	0
Strong	4	19	4.8	9	0
Wallace	4	17	4.3	11	0
Burleson	2	4	2.0	3	0
Plackemeier	1	0	0.0	0	0
SEAHAWKS	**430**	**1619**	**3.8**	**46**	**9**
OPPONENTS	422	1644	3.9	53t	16

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Engram	94	1147	12.2	49	6
Burleson	50	694	13.9	45t	9
Branch	49	661	13.5	65	4
Weaver	39	313	8.0	46	0
Hackett	32	384	12.0	59	3
Pollard	28	273	9.8	22	2
Morris	23	213	9.3	34t	1
Alexander	14	76	5.4	18	1
Heller	13	82	6.3	25	3
Obomanu	12	180	15.0	30	1
Strong	9	72	8.0	15	0
Taylor	5	38	7.6	12	0
Wallace	2	47	23.5	29	0
Pearman	1	1	1.0	1	0
SEAHAWKS	**371**	**4181**	**11.3**	**65**	**30**
OPPONENTS	333	3808	11.4	79t	15

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Hasselbeck	562	352	3966	28	12
Wallace	28	19	215	2	1
SEAHAWKS	**590**	**371**	**4181**	**30**	**13**
OPPONENTS	568	333	3808	15	20

SACKS SEAHAWKS 45, OPPONENTS 36

Kerney 14.5, Peterson 9.5, Tapp 7, Bernard 3.5, Hill 3, Mebane 2, Wyms 2, Babineaux 1, Russell 1, Tatupu 1, Darby 0.5

of his in the first four games and Tapp had four in one game.

The Seahawks obviously have the ability to pressure the opposing quarterback, but they need to find a way to do it with more consistency. That's why USC end Lawrence Jackson was drafted in the first round. He will work in a rotation with Kerney and Tapp and challenge for the starting job on the right side.

Of greater concern, however, is the ability to stop the run. Because the Seahawks play small on the edges, they need bulk in the middle of the line. That's why 328-pound Red Bryant of Texas A&M was selected in the fourth round of the draft. He will work in a rotation that also features veteran starter Rocky Bernard and second-year man Brandon Mebane, who played well last season when forced into the lineup because of injuries. **GRADE: B-**

Linebackers The defense has become the strength of this team—it's odd to say that about a Holmgren-coached team—and the linebackers are the strength of the defense. Middle linebacker Tatupu is the leader of the unit, and the defense. He uses instincts honed by dogged video study and an aggressive style to compensate for a lack of prototypical size and speed. The trade-off obviously works, as Tatupu has led the team in tackles and played in the Pro Bowl in each of his three seasons.

Peterson's value is his versatility. It's not uncommon to see him collect a sack as a rush end in the nickel, break up a pass 20 yards downfield and chase down a running play from behind—all in the same game. Leroy Hill has Pro Bowl potential, and his ability to line up on either the strong or weak side provides flexibility. The coaches need to devise ways to better utilize his talents, however. Hill is one of the best blitzers on the team, as evidenced by his seven-sack rookie campaign. But with Peterson's arrival in free agency the following year, he inherited many of the things Hill was allowed to do.

Depth is a problem after the losses of Kevin Bentley and Niko Koutouvides in free agency. **GRADE: A-**

Secondary The Seahawks made rebuilding their secondary a priority last season, with impressive results. Pro Bowl cornerback Marcus Trufant remains the best player, but the additions of safeties Deon Grant and Brian Russell in free agency helped slam the door on the deep pass plays that tormented the team in 2006. Also, the emergence of Kelly Jennings as the starter at right corner to complement Trufant allowed the coaches to play more aggressively. The best of the backups remains Jordan Babineaux, whose versatility has allowed him to start games at cornerback and safety. **GRADE: B**

SPECIAL TEAMS

This unit's coach, Bruce DeHaven, is facing a major rebuilding job, even in an area in which turnover is an annual endeavor. The Seahawks lost clutch kicker Josh Brown and leading tackler and special-teams captain Koutouvides in free agency. Jeff Robinson, the veteran long snapper DeHaven coaxed into signing at midseason after the team had burned through two others, has returned to retirement. Also, punter Ryan Plackemeier, one of the few holdovers, struggled with his consistency last season after a strong rookie campaign. The return game also remains somewhat in doubt. Burleson has been handling both punts and kickoffs, but he will be needed to carry a bigger load in the passing game because of Branch's recovery from knee surgery and the free-agent departure of Hackett. To replace Brown, veteran kicker Olindo Mare was signed and will be challenged by University of Georgia rookie Brandon Coutu, a seventh-round draft choice. The re-signing of Lewis should help fill the void created on the coverage units by Koutouvides' departure. **GRADE: C-**

BOTTOM LINE

The Seahawks have captured four consecutive NFC West titles and, at last check, the road to the division championship still runs through Qwest Field. With that comes an automatic playoff berth and a likely home game in the first round. The Seahawks have used that formula to advance to the second round the past two seasons. While the offense might need some time to develop because of the new faces at key positions, the defense will be improved from last year. That should be enough for the Seahawks to win another NFC West title.

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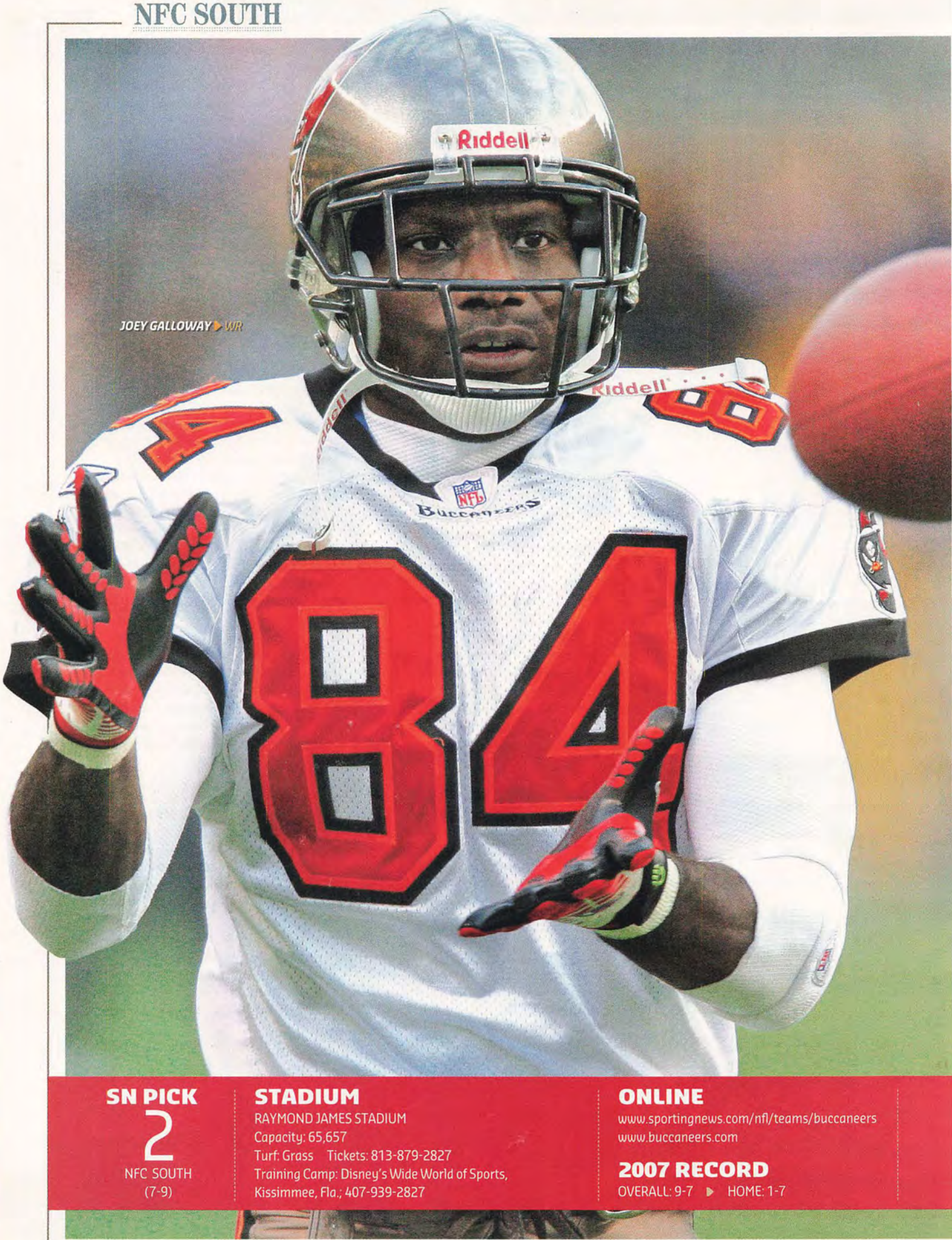
FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT

STEADY

HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL



SN PICK
2
NFC SOUTH
(7-9)

STADIUM
RAYMOND JAMES STADIUM
Capacity: 65,657
Turf: Grass Tickets: 813-879-2827
Training Camp: Disney's Wide World of Sports, Kissimmee, Fla.; 407-939-2827

ONLINE
www.sportingnews.com/nfl/teams/buccaneers
www.buccaneers.com

2007 RECORD
OVERALL: 9-7 ▶ HOME: 1-7

(L TO R): JASON BRIDGE / US PRESSWIRE; GLENN ANDREWS / US PRESSWIRE; HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL

TAMPA BAY

BUCCANEERS

Do Bucs' veterans have one last division-title hurrah left?

By Roy Cummings, *Tampa Tribune*

In Tampa Bay, the Jon Gruden era has enjoyed the consistency of a seesaw. Every time the team makes its way up, it drops right back down. If that trend continues following last season's NFC South title—and there's reason to believe it could—2008 will be another downer for the Buccaneers.

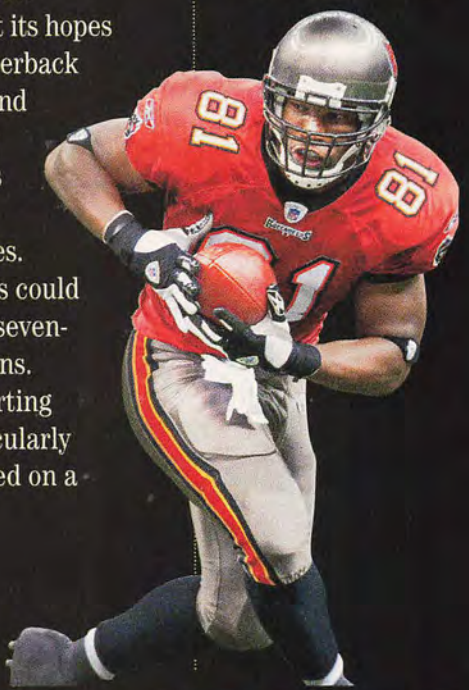
To stay on top, the team will again rest its hopes on several aging players, including quarterback Jeff Garcia, linebacker Derrick Brooks and cornerback Ronde Barber, who have yet to let the years catch up to them. Brooks and Barber, in particular, continue to lead one of the league's stingiest defenses.

If the offense can keep pace, the Bucs could become the first team in the division's seven-year history to claim back-to-back crowns. Garcia needs to produce, but his supporting cast must also step up its game—particularly in the red zone, where the unit sputtered on a regular basis last year.

BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

ALEX SMITH ▶ TE

Smith has spent the last three years adjusting to the NFL and mastering coach Jon Gruden's scheme. With the situation at wide receiver a little shaky, look for Smith to become a go-to guy in the offense, particularly in the red zone.



FANTASY SPIN

http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football

Jeff Garcia's low interception rate is nice, but the 38-year-old is injury-prone and doesn't throw for enough yards or touchdowns to be a reliable No. 1 starter.

$ BUY »» Earnest Graham, RB

SELL »» Ike Hilliard, WR

Z SLEEPER »» Warrick Dunn, RB

GRAHAM HILLIARD DUNN

OFFENSE

The offense is built to run the ball, but Gruden prefers to throw it. He proved that again last year by refusing to move away from a struggling passing attack during a first-round playoff loss to the Giants, who were having a hard time stopping the run. The plan might have worked had the team put more faith in its spare wideouts. Instead, the offense often treats wide receiver Joey Galloway as its only weapon. Galloway can still make big plays, but the Bucs need to add another dimension to their attack. That means making generous use of running backs Earnest Graham, Warrick Dunn and Michael Bennett, and pounding the ball behind a physical and aggressive offensive line.

Quarterbacks Don't let the date on his birth certificate fool you. Garcia, now 38, can still play. Last year, he ranked third in the NFC in passer rating despite running an offense that had a dearth of weapons even before it was decimated by injuries.

The key to Garcia's success is his pinpoint accuracy, even on deep throws, and an uncanny ability to keep plays alive. He moves like he's 18, and Garcia missed only two games to injury last year, both because of a back bruise.

It will take another injury to get Garcia out of the lineup, but the Bucs won't have to worry as much about that scenario now that they finally have an experienced veteran in Brian Griese backing him up. In addition to his 10 years and 78 starts in the league, Griese spent the 2004 and '05 seasons as a Buc. Gruden knows Griese's strengths and weaknesses, which means the coach can build a game plan around him if necessary.

Chris Simms returns for another try at regaining the form he displayed before having his spleen removed nearly two years ago, and it's starting to feel like do-or-die in his sixth season. Bruce Gradkowski provides further depth, but the team is very high on fifth-round draft pick Josh Johnson.

GRADE: A-

Running backs Faced with the real possibility that Cadillac Williams' season-ending torn patellar tendon will prove to be career-ending as well, the Bucs have had to rebuild

DRAFT REPORT

GRADE ▶ D-

The Buccaneers took a huge gamble with CB **Aqib Talib**. While there is little doubt Talib has first-round talent, he wasn't dominant at Kansas and admitted before the draft to testing positive three times for marijuana while in college. Tampa Bay's second choice, WR **Dexter Jackson**, also brings some cause for concern. Jackson played at the FCS level and had inconsistent hands while at Appalachian State. However, he rocketed up draft boards with great performances at the East/West Shrine Game, Senior Bowl and NFL Combine. Jackson will be facing pressure to live up to his second-round status. **Jeremy Zuttah** is a strong and physical offensive lineman who was productive at Rutgers and has the talent to become a solid starting guard or center. Defensive tackle **Dre Moore** has surprising athleticism for such a big man, but he must play with better leverage and intensity in order to be an NFL starter. **Josh Johnson** is a very athletic quarterback with the arm strength and quick release teams look for, but his mechanics and accuracy need a lot of work. Linebacker **Geno Hayes** fits the Bucs' defensive scheme ideally, while **Cory Boyd** is a tough and competitive runner who should challenge for a spot as the team's No. 3 tailback.

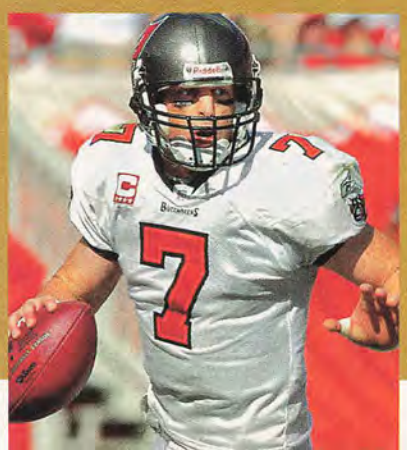
2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
1	20	Talib, Aqib	CB	6-2	205	Kansas
2	27	Jackson, Dexter	WR	5-10	180	Appalachian State
3	20	Zuttah, Jeremy	G	6-4	295	Rutgers
4	16	Moore, Dre	DT	6-4	311	Maryland
5	25	Johnson, Josh	QB	6-3	200	San Diego
6	9	Hayes, Geno	LB	6-2	218	Florida State
7	31	Boyd, Cory	RB	6-1	213	South Carolina

5-YEAR WINS TREND

THE BOOK ON ... JEFF GARCIA *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"Jeff Garcia is a real smart quarterback, a guy who does a great job of taking advantage of his experience and (overcoming his) somewhat limited physical makeup. He's not real big and he doesn't have a great arm, but he's very accurate with his throws and he uses his quick release and his legs very well. He can get out of trouble with the best of them and still make a play for you, which is his biggest asset. The downside is that he's 38 and starting to show signs of it. Nagging injuries like the back problem he had last year require more time to recover now. It would help him immensely if he was protected a little better, because you worry about the number of hits he takes. He's a real competitor, which you love, but it's hard to imagine him lasting 16 games plus playoffs. You better have a good backup behind him, and it would help him a lot if he had a good running game to lean on."



NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	326.8	18
RUSHING	117.0	11
PASSING	209.8	16
SCORING	334	18t
PUNT RETURNS	6.7	28
KICK RETURNS	23.3	12
RED ZONE TD %	43.5	26
TOTAL DEFENSE	278.4	2
AGAINST RUSH	107.9	17
AGAINST PASS	170.5	1
POINTS ALLOWED	270	3
INTERCEPTIONS	16	17t
SACKS	33	16t
TURNOVER DIFF.	+15	4

TOP TO BOTTOM: KIM KLEMENT / US PRESSWIRE; DAVID DUROCHIK FOR SN

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE *(an opponent breaks down the Buccaneers)*

"They are still a very good defense, but I think they've evolved from the animal they were a few years ago, built purely on speed. Adding a guy like Kevin Carter on the end (helps) with being able to rotate guys through. Gaines Adams was a different type of player later in the year, just in his development. The emergence of Greg White helps them on defense. They're just not that speed machine they used to be with a young Derrick Brooks and Simeon Rice. They're a more orthodox defense now. But I think you still know when you're facing Monte Kiffin's defense. Obviously you see a larger amount of Tampa 2 because that's their defense."

their backfield. They've done so with mostly spare parts, promoting former special-teams standout Graham from their own squad, acquiring ex-Chiefs backup Bennett in a trade and bringing back Dunn via free agency. The resulting whole has the potential to be much greater than its parts would indicate. In fact, this group has a chance to give the Bucs one of the more formidable running attacks in the NFC.

Graham showed last year that he can carry a heavy workload, rushing for nearly 900 yards in just 10 starts. Bennett, meanwhile, remains a legitimate home-run threat, and Dunn has vowed to prove that the Falcons messed up by letting him go. Don't be surprised if he does. Before back problems slowed him early on last year, Dunn ran for more than 1,000 yards in each of his previous three seasons with the Falcons. He did this, in part, by avoiding major injuries while carrying the ball an average of just 17.3 times per game. With Graham on board, Dunn's rushing burden in Tampa figures to be about the same, if not a little less. That should allow the Bucs to get the most out of the 33-year-old back while leaving the heavy lifting to Graham. Bennett is a change-of-pace rusher who has the playmaking ability the Bucs lost when Williams went down.

For the most part, the tailbacks will run behind B.J. Askew, an underrated fullback with exceptional pass-catching and blocking skills. **GRADE: C+**

Receivers » Even at 36, Galloway remains one of the league's most explosive and dangerous deep threats. There are two problems, though. Galloway is coming off a shoulder operation that could limit him early on in the season, and no one on the roster can consistently keep opponents from double-teaming him.

Ike Hilliard did a decent job of taking the heat off of Galloway last season, but he's no spring chicken, either. He turned 32 during the offseason and, while solid overall and reliable on third down, he's not a threat to go deep or make big plays. The most logical candidate to break out may be Dexter Jackson, whom the Bucs took with their second-round pick in the draft. Jackson has incredible speed, but he's very small (5-10, 180 pounds) and rather raw as a receiver.

The Bucs are hoping one-time sensation Michael Clayton can finally regain the form he showed as a rookie, but after three years of waiting, that no longer seems very likely. Third-year receiver Maurice Stovall may have the chance to step up. He has excellent size, hands and leaping ability—all the elements Gruden wants in a go-to flanker. Like Galloway, though, Stovall is coming off surgery. He broke his arm in a game against San Francisco on Dec. 23 and may be limited, at least in the early going. Paris Warren could also push for playing time. He was the Bucs' best receiver in training camp last year, but a broken leg forced him to miss all of the regular season. If he can pick up where he left off last August, Warren could make quite an impact.

With all the questions at receiver, the Bucs will go into the season looking to make more use of their tight ends. The team has at least one very good pass-catching end in Alex Smith. **GRADE: C**

Offensive line » For the first time in Gruden's tenure, the offensive line is a strength, not a weakness. The change has resulted from good drafting, even better free-agent selections and patience. This is not a veteran group by any means, but the players here are big, physical and mean. They're also very

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		
QB	Jeff Garcia	Brian Griese
FB	B.J. Askew	Byron Storer
RB	Earnest Graham	Warrick Dunn
WR	Joey Galloway	Paris Warren
WR	Ike Hilliard	Michael Clayton
TE	Alex Smith	Ben Troupe
LT	Donald Penn	Luke Petitgout
LG	Arron Sears	Dan Buenning
C	Jeff Faine	Jeremy Zuttah
RG	Davin Joseph	Dan Buenning
RT	Jeremy Trueblood	Anthony Davis
DEFENSE		
LE	Marques Douglas	Gaines Adams
DT	Jovan Haye	Jimmy Wilkerson
NT	Chris Hovan	Ryan Sims
RE	Gaines Adams	Greg White
SLB	Cato June	Ryan Nece
MLB	Barrett Ruud	Teddy Lehman
WLB	Derrick Brooks	Cato June
LCB	Phillip Buchanon	Aqib Talib
SS	Jermaine Phillips	Sabby Piscitelli
FS	Tanard Jackson	Eugene Wilson
RCB	Ronde Barber	Eugene Wilson
SPECIALISTS		
K	Josh Bidwell	
P	Matt Bryant	
KR	Dexter Jackson	
PR	Micheal Spurlock	
LS	Andrew Economos	

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1	@ New Orleans	SEPT. 7	1:00
WEEK 2	Atlanta	SEPT. 14	4:05
WEEK 3	@ Chicago	SEPT. 21	1:00
WEEK 4	Green Bay	SEPT. 28	1:00
WEEK 5	@ Denver	OCT. 5	4:05
WEEK 6	Carolina	OCT. 12	1:00
WEEK 7	Seattle	OCT. 19	8:15
WEEK 8	@ Dallas	OCT. 26	1:00
WEEK 9	@ Kansas City	NOV. 2	1:00
WEEK 10	*OPEN DATE*		
WEEK 11	Minnesota	NOV. 16	1:00
WEEK 12	@ Detroit	NOV. 23	1:00
WEEK 13	New Orleans	NOV. 30	1:00
WEEK 14	@ Carolina	DEC. 8	8:30
WEEK 15	@ Atlanta	DEC. 14	1:00
WEEK 16	San Diego	DEC. 21	8:15
WEEK 17	Oakland	DEC. 28	1:00

W — L — SCORE

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

athletic, making this one of the best young lines in the league.

The strength of the unit lies in the middle, where second-year left guard Arron Sears and third-year right guard Davin Joseph surround Jeff Faine, now the game's highest-paid center. Faine, who signed a six-year, $37.5 million contract on the first day of free agency, replaces John Wade and figures to give the Bucs even better defensive diagnosis and pass protection. Faine can also get out and pull as a run blocker, and he reaches the second level quickly and with pop.

Joseph seems Pro Bowl-bound. A smart player who can really flatten defensive linemen in the run game, he sets up well and seldom misses an assignment in pass protection. He's mean, but not as mean as Sears, who is easily the most physical member of the unit and has the talent to match. He started every game as a rookie last year and figures to be even better as a sophomore.

The same can probably be said for third-year left tackle Donald Penn, a player who came out of nowhere last year to more than adequately fill the hole that opened when Luke Petitgout went down in Week 4 with a season-ending knee injury. Penn might be the team's best pass protector. If he can add some bulk and power, Penn will be the complete package. If not, he may have a hard time keeping Petitgout from winning back the starting job. Right tackle Jeremy Trueblood is a tower of a player, but that's not necessarily an asset. He tends to stand too tall and struggles to get the proper pad level in both pass protection and run blocking. **GRADE: B**

DEFENSE

The Bucs are a fast-improving team up front, and that's where it all begins in coordinator Monte Kiffin's Tampa 2 scheme. Kiffin wants the bulk of the pressure on the passer to come from his four down linemen. That allows the team to leave seven defenders in coverage, which makes it harder for quarterbacks to find open receivers. Against the run, the team wants a hammer coming up from the deep secondary, and the Bucs appear to have one now that strong safety Jermaine Phillips is playing with reckless abandon again. The team plays mostly zone schemes in coverage, but corners Phillip Buchanon, Eugene Wilson and rookie Aqib Talib and free safety Tanard Jackson are all tough to beat on their own. That will allow the Bucs to continue playing some cover 3 and man-to-man, but cover 2 remains the base scheme.

Defensive line The Bucs took a strange step toward improving their pass rush heading into the 2007 season: they got rid of their best pass rusher. It was a curious and controversial move, but the decision to part with Simeon Rice proved among the best the team made all year, as it allowed Arena League refugee Greg White to blossom into a quality NFL player. It also forced first-round draft pick Gaines Adams to mature quickly and improve his work habits, and he responded with six sacks.

Tampa Bay signed defensive end Marques Douglas away from the 49ers and re-signed Kevin Carter, and both will work the early downs as needed. The passing downs belong to White and Adams. By the end of last season, both were applying the kind of pressure the Bucs look for. The team expects that trend to continue, in part because it has another budding star in tackle Jovan Haye. However, Haye is an unrestricted free agent who had yet to sign as of press time. Haye, who notched six sacks in '07, has big hands and can stop the run. Though still new to the position after playing most of his amateur career at end, he gives the Bucs their best play at under tackle since Warren Sapp. With veteran Chris Hovan working the nose, the team has the makings of a solid line that can pressure the QB and stop the run. **GRADE: B**

Linebackers Brooks, Barrett Ruud and Cato June are three of the league's best playmaking linebackers, but it can be hard to tell because they seldom get the attention they deserve. Brooks has always been among the most humble

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/09	L	6-20	at Seattle Seahawks
09/16	W	31-14	New Orleans Saints
09/23	W	24-3	St. Louis Rams
09/30	W	20-7	at Carolina Panthers
10/07	L	14-33	at Indianapolis Colts
10/14	W	13-10	Tennessee Titans
10/21	L	16-23	at Detroit Lions
10/28	L	23-24	Jacksonville Jaguars
11/04	W	17-10	Arizona Cardinals
11/18	W	31-7	at Atlanta Falcons
11/25	W	19-13	Washington Redskins
12/02	W	27-23	at New Orleans Saints
12/09	L	14-28	at Houston Texans
12/16	W	37-3	Atlanta Falcons
12/23	L	19-21	at San Francisco 49ers
12/30	L	23-31	Carolina Panthers

WON 9, LOST 7

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Graham	222	898	4.0	28t	10
Pittman	68	286	4.2	29	0
Williams	54	208	3.9	20	3
Bennett	41	189	4.6	28	1
McCown	12	117	9.8	31	0
Garcia	35	116	3.3	21	1
Clayton	5	22	4.4	20	0
Gradkowski	7	20	2.9	13	0
Darby	2	9	4.5	7	0
Hilliard	1	6	6.0	6	0
Galloway	1	1	1.0	1	0
Crockett	1	0	0.0	0	0
BUCCANEERS	**449**	**1872**	**4.2**	**31**	**15**
OPPONENTS	454	1726	3.8	32t	11

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Hilliard	62	722	11.6	56	1
Galloway	57	1014	17.8	69t	6
Graham	49	324	6.6	21	0
Smith	32	385	12.0	33	3
Pittman	26	191	7.3	16	0
Clayton	22	301	13.7	39	0
Askew	18	175	9.7	22	0
Stevens	18	189	10.5	24t	4
Stovall	10	86	8.6	13	1
Becht	5	20	4.0	9	2
Bennett	5	54	10.8	23t	1
Lucas	5	82	16.4	52	0
Williams	3	17	5.7	8	0
Darby	2	16	8.0	9	0
Storer	2	3	1.5	2	0
BUCCANEERS	**316**	**3579**	**11.3**	**69t**	**18**
OPPONENTS	297	2935	9.9	58	18

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Garcia	327	209	2440	13	4
McCown	139	94	1009	5	3
Gradkowski	24	13	130	0	1
BUCCANEERS	**490**	**316**	**3579**	**18**	**8**
OPPONENTS	490	297	2935	18	16

SACKS **BUCCANEERS 33, OPPONENTS 36**

White 8, Adams 6, Haye 6, Carter 3, Spires 2, Hovan 1.5, Peterson 1.5, Barber 1, Chukwurah 1, Phillips 1, Sims 1

OFFSEASON MOVES

ADDITIONS:

C **John Faine** *(FA/Saints)*, TE **John Gilmore** *(FA/Bears)*, DE **Jimmy Wilkerson** *(FA/Chiefs)*, LB **Leon Joe** *(FA/Bills)*, QB **Brian Griese** *(trade/Bears)*, LB **Matt McCoy** *(FA/Saints)*, LB **Teddy Lehman** *(FA/Lions)*, TE **Ben Troupe** *(FA/Titans)*, RB **Warrick Dunn** *(FA/Falcons)*, DB **Eugene Wilson** *(FA/Patriots)*, DE **Marques Douglas** *(FA/49ers)*

SUBTRACTIONS:

DE **Greg Spires** *(FA)*, G **Matt Lehr** *(FA/Saints)*, TE **Jerramy Stevens** *(FA)*, DB **Brian Kelly** *(FA/Lions)*, RB **Michael Pittman** *(FA)*, C **John Wade** *(FA/Raiders)*, LB **Jeremiah Trotter** *(FA)*, TE **Anthony Becht** *(FA/Rams)*

BUCCANEERS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1 **Derrick Brooks** *(1995-present)*

Arguably the best outside linebacker of his era in the NFL.

2 **Richard "Batman" Wood** *(1976-84)*

Played an integral role in getting the Bucs to their first run of playoff appearances.

3 **Hardy Nickerson** *(1993-99)*

Derrick Brooks learned how to be a pro by watching Nickerson on and off the field.

INSIDE THE HEADSET

JON GRUDEN

Gruden wants to throw the ball, but he's not a big gambler. He'll only go deep on occasion, sticking generally to a West Coast-based scheme that utilizes short throws to backs and receivers running slants across the middle. He doesn't use a lot of trick plays and is often hesitant to go for it on fourth-and-1. His playbook is vast and he'll use a lot of pre-snap motion in an effort to confuse the defense, but opponents seem to have caught on to his switches.

players in the league, and Ruud, who led the team in tackles last season, has followed his lead. The addition of June brought the group another step forward, but none received a Pro Bowl nod. The Bucs ranked second in total defense in 2007, due in no small part to their play at this position.

Brooks, who started to show signs of aging two years ago, actually improved last season once he was surrounded by better talent. Ruud immediately erased the team's concerns about parting with longtime starter Shelton Quarles, and he should benefit from having a full season of running the defense under his belt. June, meanwhile, seems perfectly suited for Kiffin's scheme. He has great mobility and speed and can deliver a blow. **GRADE: A**

Secondary » If the Bucs suffer any drop-off defensively, it will likely take place here, where the team lacks ideal depth.

Though he didn't see the field much last year, Brian Kelly played just enough to push Buchanon. With Kelly gone, Buchanon could revert to his old ways and all but ignore the run-stopping duties that are so critical to success in Kiffin's scheme. To keep that from happening, the Bucs signed Wilson, a former Patriot who can play either corner or safety, and then drafted Kansas standout Talib in the first round. Both were exceptional pickups. Talib has the ability to push for playing time right away, and Wilson can do the same if Talib struggles.

Barber returns to play right corner on early downs and the slot on nickel downs. With Wilson backing him up and Talib on board, the secondary should be strong again, because the safeties won't change. Phillips and Jackson return as the starters, and nothing should keep them from making the big plays that were their trademark last year. **GRADE: B**

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Bucs have one of the best kicking games in the league. Matt Bryant is very steady and has the leg necessary to make big kicks in crunch time. Punter Josh Bidwell has one of the strongest legs in the league, and he's usually pretty accurate. As his 30 punts landed inside the 20-yard line last year show, he's a good asset for an offense that often needs to be bailed out of trouble. Dexter Jackson's dynamic speed makes him a threat on punt returns, and Micheal Spurlock showed the ability to take it to the house on kick returns last year. **GRADE: C**

BOTTOM LINE

The Bucs have the talent to become the first repeat champion in the NFC South, but too many key players such as Garcia, Galloway and Brooks have their best years behind them.

82

FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT

STEADY

HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL

ROSTER

#	QUARTERBACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
7	Garcia, Jeff	QB	6-1	205	02/24/1970	9	San Jose State
5	Gradkowski, Bruce	QB	6-1	222	01/27/1983	2	Toledo
8	Griese, Brian	QB	6-3	214	03/18/1975	10	Michigan
12	McCown, Luke	QB	6-3	212	07/12/1981	2	Louisiana Tech
2	Simms, Chris	QB	6-4	220	08/29/1980	5	Texas

#	OFFENSIVE LINE	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
72	Buenning, Dan	G	6-4	320	10/26/1981	2	Wisconsin
69	Davis, Anthony	T	6-4	322	03/27/1980	4	Virginia Tech
74	Denman, Chris	T	6-6	305	10/07/1983	0	Fresno State
48	Economos, Andrew	C	6-1	250	06/24/1982	2	Georgia Tech
52	Faine, Jeff	C	6-3	291	04/06/1981	5	Notre Dame
64	Johnson, Brian	G	6-4	307	03/24/1984	0	LSU
75	Joseph, Davin	G	6-3	312	11/23/1983	2	Oklahoma
70	Penn, Donald	T	6-5	305	04/27/1983	1	Utah State
77	Petitgout, Luke	T	6-6	308	06/16/1976	9	Notre Dame
73	Roland, Dennis	T	6-9	325	03/10/1983	0	Georgia
78	Sears, Arron	G	6-4	320	10/25/1984	1	Tennessee
65	Trueblood, Jeremy	T	6-8	320	05/10/1983	2	Boston College

#	RUNNING BACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
35	Askew, B.J.	RB	6-3	233	08/19/1980	5	Michigan
29	Bennett, Michael	RB	5-9	207	08/13/1978	7	Wisconsin
33	Darby, Kenneth	RB	5-10	211	12/26/1982	1	Alabama
28	Dunn, Warrick	RB	5-9	180	01/05/1975	11	Florida State
34	Graham, Earnest	RB	5-9	225	01/15/1980	4	Florida
44	Storer, Byron	RB	6-1	219	05/01/1984	1	California
24	Williams, Carnell	RB	5-11	217	04/21/1982	3	Auburn

#	RECEIVERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
10	Biddle, Taye	WR	6-1	185	02/27/1983	1	Mississippi
89	Bryant, Antonio	WR	6-2	188	03/09/1981	5	Pittsburgh
18	Clark, Brian	WR	6-3	205	12/26/1983	2	North Carolina State
80	Clayton, Michael	WR	6-4	215	10/13/1982	4	LSU
46	Fells, Daniel	TE	6-4	252	09/23/1983	0	California-Davis
84	Galloway, Joey	WR	5-11	197	11/20/1971	13	Ohio State
88	Gilmore, John	TE	6-5	257	09/21/1979	6	Penn State
14	Hankton, Cortez	WR	6-0	200	01/20/1981	4	Texas Southern
87	Heinrich, Keith	TE	6-6	255	03/19/1979	4	Sam Houston State
19	Hilliard, Ike	WR	5-11	210	04/05/1976	11	Florida
15	Lucas, Chad	WR	6-1	201	11/07/1981	2	Alabama State
81	Smith, Alex	TE	6-4	258	05/22/1982	3	Stanford
17	Spurlock, Micheal	WR	5-11	200	01/31/1983	2	Mississippi
85	Stovall, Maurice	WR	6-5	220	02/21/1985	2	Notre Dame
84	Troupe, Ben	TE	6-4	270	09/01/1982	4	Florida
82	Warren, Paris	WR	6-0	213	09/06/1982	1	Utah

#	DEFENSIVE LINE	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
90	Adams, Gaines	DE	6-5	260	06/08/1983	1	Clemson
92	Bennett, Charles	DE	6-3	245	04/04/1983	1	Clemson
93	Carter, Kevin	DE	6-6	305	09/21/1973	13	Florida
94	Douglas, Marques	DE	6-2	292	03/05/1977	8	Howard
79	Gunn, Marquies	DE	6-4	264	11/22/1983	0	Auburn
71	Haye, Jovan	DE	6-2	285	06/21/1982	3	Vanderbilt
95	Hovan, Chris	DT	6-2	298	05/12/1978	8	Boston College
96	Peterson, Greg	DT	6-5	286	01/21/1984	1	North Carolina Central
98	Sims, Ryan	DT	6-4	315	05/04/1980	6	North Carolina
91	White, Greg	DE	6-3	268	07/25/1979	1	Minnesota
97	Wilkerson, Jimmy	DE	6-2	290	01/04/1981	5	Oklahoma

#	DEFENSIVE BACKS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
26	Allen, Will	S	6-1	200	06/17/1982	4	Ohio State
20	Barber, Ronde	CB	5-10	184	04/07/1975	11	Virginia
31	Buchanon, Phillip	CB	5-11	185	09/19/1980	6	Miami (FL)
27	Cox, Torrie	CB	5-9	181	10/29/1980	4	Pittsburgh
22	Davis, Sammy	CB	6-1	195	04/08/1980	5	Texas A&M
32	Hamilton, Marcus	CB	5-11	188	02/17/1984	0	Virginia
37	Hunter, Darrell	CB	5-11	211	11/29/1983	1	Miami (OH)
28	Jackson, Tanard	S	6-0	200	07/21/1985	1	Syracuse
30	Nicholson, Donte	S	6-1	216	12/18/1981	3	Oklahoma
23	Phillips, Jermaine	S	6-2	220	03/27/1979	6	Georgia
21	Piscitelli, Sabby	S	6-3	224	08/24/1983	1	Oregon State
38	Wilson, Eugene	CB	5-10	195	08/17/1980	5	Illinois

#	LINEBACKERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
58	Black, Quincy	LB	6-3	227	02/28/1984	1	New Mexico
55	Brooks, Derrick	LB	6-0	235	04/18/1973	13	Florida State
50	Cash, Antoine	LB	6-1	223	03/05/1982	2	Southern Miss
54	Chukwurah, Patrick	LB	6-1	250	03/01/1979	6	Wyoming
57	Hayward, Adam	LB	6-0	235	06/23/1984	1	Portland State
49	Joe, Leon	LB	6-1	235	10/26/1981	4	Maryland
59	June, Cato	LB	6-0	227	11/18/1979	5	Michigan
53	Lehman, Teddy	LB	6-1	238	11/18/1981	4	Oklahoma
41	McCoy, Matt	LB	5-11	230	10/14/1982	3	San Diego State
56	Nece, Ryan	LB	6-3	224	02/24/1979	6	UCLA
51	Ruud, Barrett	LB	6-2	241	05/20/1983	3	Nebraska

#	KICKERS	»	HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
9	Bidwell, Josh	P	6-3	220	03/13/1976	8	Oregon
3	Bryant, Matt	K	5-9	200	05/29/1975	6	Baylor

▶ **JON GRUDEN,** *Head coach*

Bill Muir, off. coord./off. line; **Monte Kiffin**, def. coord.; **Tim Berbenich**, asst. running backs; **Richard Bisaccia**, associate head coach/special teams/running backs; **Casey Bradley**, linebackers; **Bob Casullo**, tight ends; **Larry Coyer**, asst. head coach; **Richard Mann**, wide receivers; **Raheem Morris**, def. backs; **Greg Olson**, quarterbacks; **Todd Wash**, def. line; **George Yarno**, asst. off. line

WASHINGTON REDSKINS

VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDELINE

(an opponent breaks down the Redskins)

"They have good, solid players, with several playmakers on offense: Clinton Portis, Ladell Betts, Chris Cooley and Santana Moss. They can be difficult to defend.

"On their offensive line, they've got solid, tough, smart guys. I wouldn't say it's a dominant line, but they can run the ball when they need to.

"On defense, they're dependable and tough and have good, veteran players. They don't have as many playmakers as they would like. (LaRon) Landry is one, and (Rocky) McIntosh looks like he could develop into one. They've got some age on the defensive line, and that has to be a concern.

"To be a good cover team, they need Carlos Rogers back and healthy. I'm not sold on Fred Smoot as a starter. Shawn Springs is a good player, when he's healthy, but he's also on the downside of his career.

"On special teams, their kicker (Shaun Suisham) and punter (Derrick Frost) are average to below average. I really like their return guys, Antwaan Randle El and Rock Cartwright. They're effective players.

Their coverage teams usually are pretty good, but that's generally the area where you have the most turnover. That's why having nine draft choices this year should help them."

Snyder tries a novel approach as 'Skins look to build under Zorn

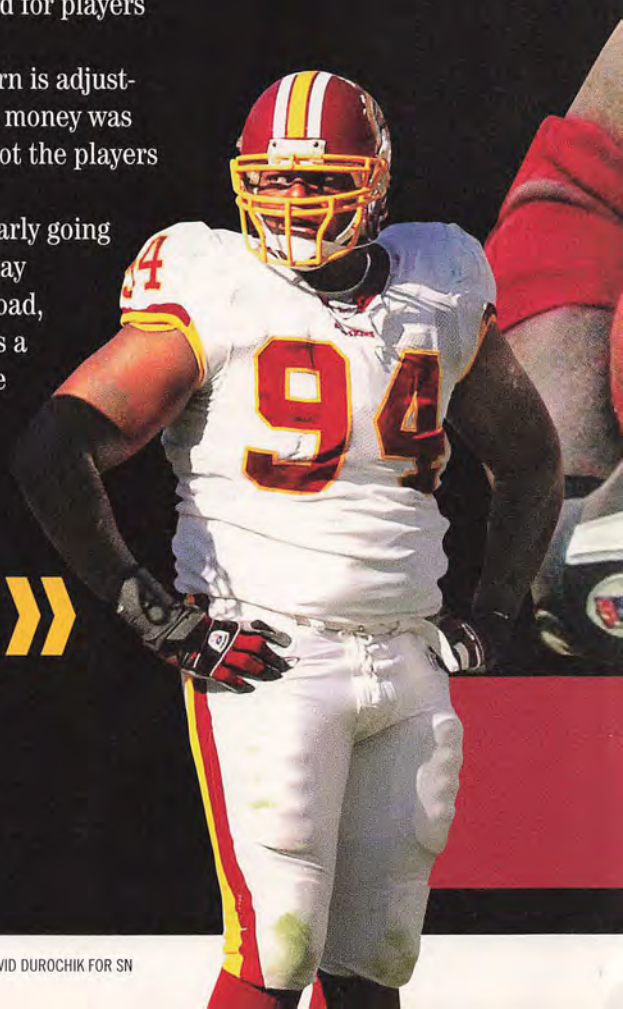
By Paul Woody, *Richmond Times-Dispatch*

A new word has entered the Redskins' vocabulary—patience.

Team owner Daniel Snyder was patient in his search for a new coach. In free agency, Snyder and executive vice president of football operations Vinny Cerrato showed great patience and restraint. On draft day, the team patiently waited for players to fall to them.

So far, patience has paid off. Jim Zorn is adjusting to his first job as a head coach. No money was wasted in free agency. The Redskins got the players they wanted in the draft.

Patience will be imperative in the early going of the regular season. The Redskins play three of their first five games on the road, all against NFC East opponents. That's a tough assignment, especially when the club is learning a new offense and adjusting to a new head coach.

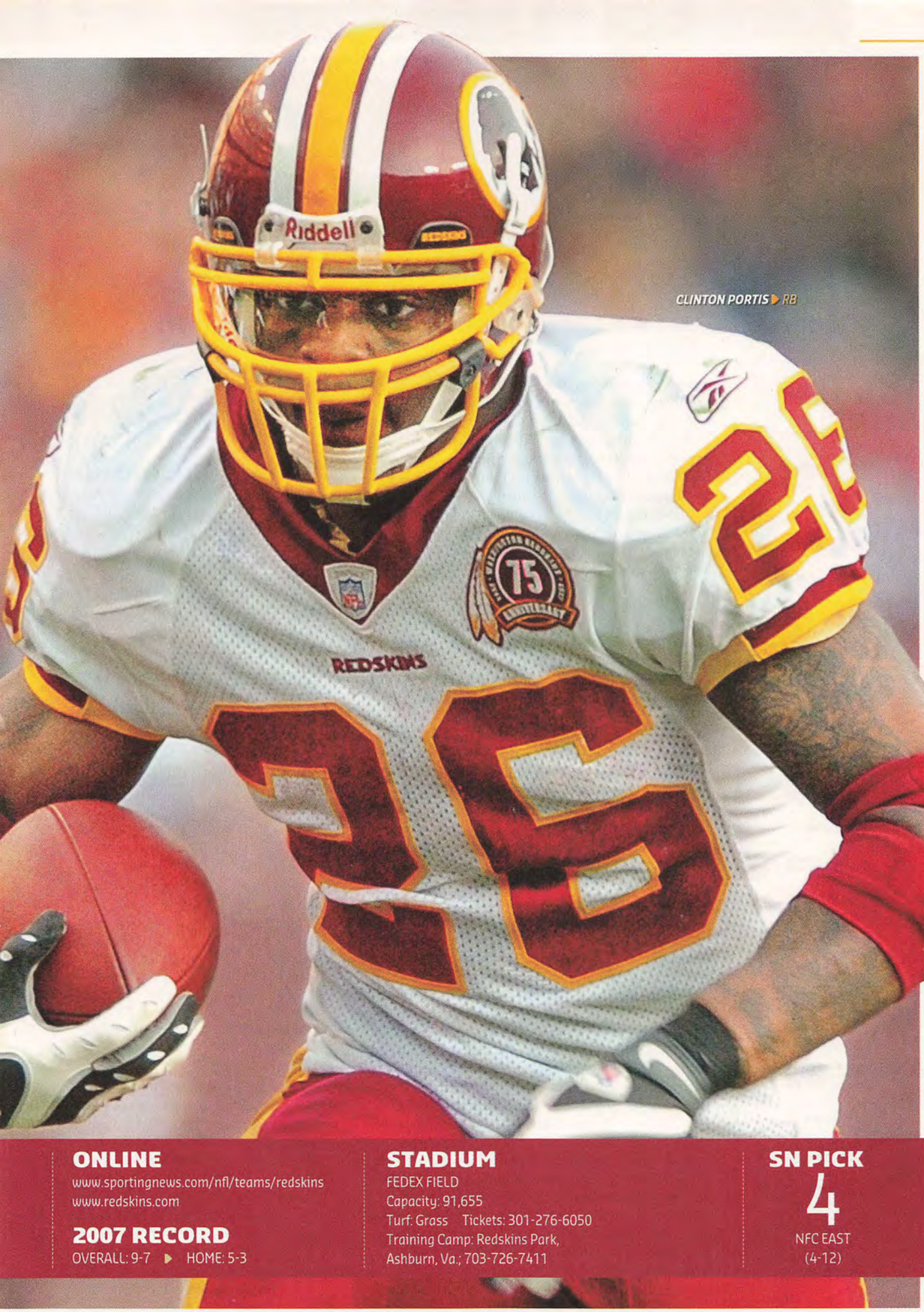


BREAKOUT CANDIDATE

ANTHONY MONTGOMERY ▶ DT

Montgomery has all the tools to be an elite-level player. He has long arms, a powerful upper body, a good base and is quick off the ball. Montgomery made enormous improvement from his rookie year to his second season. Now that he has had a taste of success, and with the team's desire to get more of a pass rush out of its tackles, Montgomery is in perfect position to have a breakout season.

(L TO R): LARRY FRENCH / GETTY IMAGES; DAVID DUROCHIK FOR SN



ONLINE

www.sportingnews.com/nfl/teams/redskins
www.redskins.com

2007 RECORD

OVERALL: 9-7 ▶ HOME: 5-3

STADIUM

FEDEX FIELD
Capacity: 91,655
Turf: Grass Tickets: 301-276-6050
Training Camp: Redskins Park,
Ashburn, Va.; 703-726-7411

SN PICK

4
NFC EAST
(4-12)

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1	@ New York Giants	SEPT. 4	7:00
WEEK 2	New Orleans	SEPT. 14	1:00
WEEK 3	Arizona	SEPT. 21	1:00
WEEK 4	@ Dallas	SEPT. 28	4:15
WEEK 5	@ Philadelphia	OCT. 5	1:00
WEEK 6	St. Louis	OCT. 12	1:00
WEEK 7	Cleveland	OCT. 19	4:15
WEEK 8	@ Detroit	OCT. 26	1:00
WEEK 9	Pittsburgh	NOV. 3	8:30
WEEK 10	*OPEN DATE*		
WEEK 11	Dallas	NOV. 16	8:15
WEEK 12	@ Seattle	NOV. 23	4:15
WEEK 13	New York Giants	NOV. 30	1:00
WEEK 14	@ Baltimore	DEC. 7	1:00
WEEK 15	@ Cincinnati	DEC. 14	1:00
WEEK 16	Philadelphia	DEC. 21	1:00
WEEK 17	@ San Francisco	DEC. 28	4:15

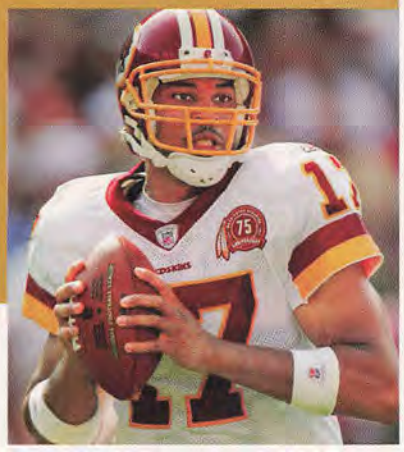
SCORE — W / L

Sunday night games in Weeks 11-17 subject to change.

THE BOOK ON ... JASON CAMPBELL *(how a rival sizes him up)*

"Jason Campbell has a number of strong points. He has a strong arm, and he's tall. His height enables him to see the field. He does a good job of not forcing things. He has the ability to make plays. One thing I really like is his willingness to stay within the system. A lot of times when a quarterback has Campbell's athletic ability and speed, he'll try to make more plays on his own or take more chances. He doesn't do that. He makes plays when everything else breaks down, but he's not looking to run at the first sign of trouble. He gives the plays a chance to develop.

"He does need to do a better job of protecting the ball when he's hit. He needs to improve his touch and accuracy on the shorter passes. That's a problem you see with a lot of tall quarterbacks who have the kind of long, full windup, which is another reason he needs to get rid of the ball quicker."



Patience, however, does not mean this is a rebuilding year. Snyder, Cerrato and Zorn expect to win and be in the playoffs.

That will be a challenge. The Redskins are in arguably the NFC's toughest division. Quarterback Jason Campbell is entering his fourth NFL season and learning his third new offense.

The Redskins should be competitive, and patience will be key. This is a team that has a chance to stay in the playoff race all year, but there will be times when things are not at all pretty.

OFFENSE

Adjustments are in order. After four years of operating in Joe Gibbs' one-back, power running game, the Redskins are shifting to Zorn's horizontal West Coast offense. Sherman Smith has the title of offensive coordinator, but this is Zorn's show. Zorn is implementing the offense and calling the plays. The Redskins have the personnel to be successful in this attack, but everyone has to learn quickly. Zorn might have to rely on the running game if the passing game is slow to develop.

Quarterbacks Campbell has the tools to be a successful NFL quarterback: a strong arm, enough speed to make plays when his protection breaks down and an impressive work ethic.

But he is in a new offense, and more emphasis than ever will be on footwork and timing. Campbell has a lot to absorb and a short amount of time to do so. He must use every snap in the offseason workouts and training camp to get a handle on what Zorn will demand from his quarterback.

Todd Collins took over last year when Campbell dislocated his left patella in December, which ended his season. Collins is practically immobile, but he understands the importance of decision-making and getting the ball out quickly, important concepts in Zorn's offense. Collins is a quick study and has been in the league long enough that few things surprise him. He does not have a great arm, but makes up for that with accurate passes.

If Campbell struggles, it will not be surprising to see Collins take over this season. Zorn does not have an investment in Campbell. The coach's interest is in winning, and if he feels Collins gives the team the best chance for that, Zorn won't hesitate to go with the veteran over the youngster. **GRADE: C**

Running backs Every team needs two solid runners, and the Redskins have a high-quality duo in Clinton Portis and Ladell Betts.

Portis still has breakaway speed on occasion, but the total of 1,147 carries over the last four years have taken a toll. He can be effective as a receiver out of the backfield, turning short passes into big gains. However, Portis needs to concentrate on looking the ball into his hands before running after the catch.

Betts is an excellent inside runner who gets through holes quickly and has enough speed to break long runs after

5-YEAR WINS TREND

NUMBERS

CATEGORY	TEAM STATS	NFL RANK
TOTAL OFFENSE	333.4	15
RUSHING	116.9	12
PASSING	216.4	14
SCORING	334	18t
PUNT RETURNS	7.5	26
KICK RETURNS	23.8	8
RED ZONE TD %	49.1	20
TOTAL DEFENSE	305.3	8
AGAINST RUSH	91.3	4
AGAINST PASS	214.0	16
POINTS ALLOWED	310	11
INTERCEPTIONS	14	23t
SACKS	33	16t
TURNOVER DIFF.	-5	21

BOB LEVERONE / SN

reaching the second level. He has excellent hands and is also a threat as a pass-catcher. Betts deserves more carries than he had last season, as he's far more than a third-down back.

Mike Sellers has been frustrated that the fullback hasn't gotten many opportunities to carry the ball in the offense over the last two years. That could change this season. Sellers is massive physically and has exceptional speed and agility for a man his size. He is also a devastating blocker.

Rock Cartwright remains more a special-teams player than running back. **GRADE: A**

Receivers » Santana Moss can be a game-breaking performer. He is quick off the line, can get open deep (even against cover-2 defenses) and adjusts to the ball as well as any receiver in the league. Moss plays hard, and never lacks for effort. But he also has had hamstring and knee problems.

Those injuries prompted the Redskins to realize they can't consistently count on the passing game being built around Moss. To add depth and insurance, Washington drafted two wide receivers, Devin Thomas from Michigan State and Malcolm Kelly from Oklahoma, in the second round this year.

Antwaan Randle El showed marked improvement during his second season with the Redskins. A continuation of that improvement could wind up with Randle El catching 70-80 passes this season. The West Coast offense should be a good fit for the seventh-year pro, especially if the team can find a big receiver to line up outside, permitting Randle El to move into the slot on third downs. Thomas and Kelly will compete for the job as the No. 3 receiver.

Tight end Chris Cooley is adept at finding open spots in defenses, then sitting down and providing the quarterback with a big target. The West Coast offense will allow him to do more of that this season. Cooley also has excellent hands, and his lower body is so powerful that he is exceptional at picking up yards after the catch.

Fred Davis, a second-round draft choice from USC, has playmaking ability. He has to improve his blocking and display a diligent work ethic to get on the field, though. **GRADE: B**

Offensive line » Is this group experienced or old? The Redskins' offensive line does not have a starter younger than 30.

However, center Casey Rabach is reaching the prime of his career. He has improved in each of the past three seasons, is strong at the point of attack, does a good job of making adjustments before the snap and is equally adept at run and pass blocking.

PROJECTED DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE		
QB	Jason Campbell	Todd Collins
FB	Mike Sellers	Todd Yoder
RB	Clinton Portis	Ladell Betts
WR	Antwaan Randle El	Malcolm Kelly
WR	Santana Moss	Devin Thomas
TE	Chris Cooley	Fred Davis
LT	Chris Samuels	Stephon Heyer
LG	Pete Kendall	Chad Rinehart
C	Casey Rabach	Chad Rinehart
RG	Randy Thomas	Jason Fabini
RT	Jon Jansen	Todd Wade
DEFENSE		
LE	Phillip Daniels	Demetric Evans
DT	Cornelius Griffin	Lorenzo Alexander
DT	Anthony Montgomery	Kedric Golston
RE	Andre Carter	Demetric Evans
SLB	Rocky McIntosh	H.B. Blades
MLB	London Fletcher	Khary Campbell
WLB	Marcus Washington	Matt Sinclair
LCB	Shawn Springs	Leigh Torrence
SS	Reed Doughty	Vernon Fox
FS	LaRon Landry	Vernon Fox
RCB	Fred Smoot	Carlos Rogers
SPECIALISTS		
K	Shaun Suisham	
P	Derrick Frost	
KR	Rock Cartwright	
PR	Antwaan Randle El	
LS	Ethan Albright	

REDSKINS' BEST-EVER LINEBACKERS

1 Chris Hanburger *(1965-78)*

There was little he couldn't do, with nine Pro Bowls in 14 seasons, and he at least deserves to be nominated for the Hall of Fame.

2 Sam Huff *(1964-69)*

He virtually created the middle-linebacker position and had a Hall-of-Fame career.

3 LaVar Arrington *(2000-05)*

He played seven seasons (one with the Giants), went to three Pro Bowls and, in 2001, had one of the most dominating seasons a linebacker could have—and he had just half a sack.

WIN McNAMEE / GETTY IMAGES

» DRAFT REPORT GRADE ▸ C

The Redskins believed they had to address the receiver position in this year's draft and got two solid prospects in Michigan State's **Devin Thomas** and Oklahoma's **Malcolm Kelly**. Thomas is a big and very athletic receiver with good hands who can also contribute as a kickoff returner, while Kelly possesses quick feet and shows real toughness running after the catch. Either one will be able to provide a big receiving target in 2008. Tight end **Fred Davis** has the athleticism, hands and receiving skills, but is not a competitive blocker and doesn't consistently play with passion. The talent is there for Davis to be a solid backup to Chris Cooley, but he'll need to step up his competitiveness to do so. Third-round pick **Chad Rinehart** showed at the Senior Bowl that he has what it takes to become a starter at right tackle or guard. Cornerback **Justin Tryon** is a tough and highly aggressive player with the speed and explosiveness to become a quality starter if he can overcome a lack of height. And while sixth-round pick **Kareem Moore** is a safety with size, he must improve his technique in order to turn his athleticism into on-field production. **Durant Brooks** has a strong and accurate leg, giving him a great chance to win the job as Washington's punter in 2008. The Redskins took a great gamble by grabbing Hawaii QB **Colt Brennan**, whose stock fell tremendously during the spring. Brennan has a quick release, solid decision-making skills and the accuracy to be a starter. However, he is smaller than ideal and lacks the arm strength to make enough throws with zip.

» 2008 DRAFTEES

RD.	PICK	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	COLLEGE
2	3	Thomas, Devin	WR	6-2	218	Michigan State
2	17	Davis, Fred	TE	6-4	250	USC
2	20	Kelly, Malcolm	WR	6-4	219	USC
3	33	Rinehart, Chad	G	6-5	308	Northern Iowa
4	25	Tryon, Justin	CB	5-9	190	Arizona State
6	2	Brooks, Durant	P	6-0	202	Georgia Tech
6	14	Moore, Kareem	CB	6-2	203	Nicholls State
6	20	Brennan, Colt	QB	6-3	205	Hawaii
7	35	Jackson, Rob	DE	6-4	259	Kansas State
7	42	Horton, Chris	S	6-0	212	UCLA

THOMAS ▸ WR

ROSTER

#	QUARTERBACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
17	Campbell, Jason	QB	6-5	230	12/31/1981	2	Auburn
15	Collins, Todd	QB	6-4	228	11/05/1971	9	Michigan
3	Hollenbach, Sam	QB	6-5	218	09/09/1983	0	Maryland

#	OFFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
67	Albright, Ethan	C	6-5	257	05/01/1971	13	North Carolina
69	Fabini, Jason	T	6-7	309	08/25/1974	10	Cincinnati
68	Geisinger, Justin	G	6-2	315	05/24/1982	1	Vanderbilt
74	Heyer, Stephon	T	6-6	320	01/16/1984	1	Maryland
76	Jansen, Jon	T	6-6	297	01/28/1976	8	Michigan
66	Kendall, Pete	G	6-5	292	07/09/1973	12	Boston College
61	Rabach, Casey	C	6-4	296	09/24/1977	6	Wisconsin
60	Samuels, Chris	T	6-5	310	07/28/1977	8	Alabama
77	Thomas, Randy	G	6-5	317	01/19/1976	9	Mississippi State
71	Wade, Todd	G	6-8	317	10/30/1976	8	Mississippi
63	Washington, Tavares	T	6-4	320	04/20/1983	0	Florida

#	RUNNING BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
46	Betts, Ladell	RB	5-11	223	08/27/1979	6	Iowa
36	Broughton, Nehemiah	RB	5-11	250	11/04/1982	2	Citadel
31	Cartwright, Rock	RB	5-8	218	12/03/1979	6	Kansas State
23	Mason, Marcus	RB	5-9	215	06/23/1984	0	Youngstown State
26	Portis, Clinton	RB	5-11	223	09/01/1981	6	Miami (FL)
45	Sellers, Mike	RB	6-3	245	07/21/1975	8	Walla Walla CC
35	Shelton, Eric	RB	6-1	246	06/23/1983	1	Louisville

#	RECEIVERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
47	Cooley, Chris	TE	6-3	249	07/11/1982	4	Utah State
88	Ecker, Tyler	TE	6-6	246	04/18/1982	0	Michigan
80	Mann, Maurice	WR	6-1	190	09/14/1982	1	Nevada
13	Mathis, Jerome	WR	5-11	191	07/26/1983	3	Hampton
16	McMullen, Billy	WR	6-4	215	03/08/1980	4	Virginia
19	Mix, Anthony	WR	6-5	235	01/20/1983	1	Auburn
89	Moss, Santana	WR	5-10	200	06/01/1979	7	Miami (FL)
82	Randle El, Antwaan	WR	5-10	192	08/17/1979	6	Indiana
83	Thrash, James	WR	6-0	200	04/28/1975	11	Missouri Southern State
18	Toler, Burl	WR	6-2	185	04/07/1983	0	California
87	Yoder, Todd	TE	6-4	253	03/18/1978	7	Vanderbilt

#	DEFENSIVE LINE		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
79	Alexander, Lorenzo	DT	6-1	300	05/31/1983	1	California
91	Askew, Matthias	DT	6-5	302	07/01/1982	2	Michigan State
73	Boschetti, Ryan	DT	6-4	311	10/07/1981	4	UCLA
90	Buzbee, Alex	DE	6-3	265	11/27/1985	0	Georgetown
99	Carter, Andre	DE	6-4	252	05/12/1979	7	California
93	Daniels, Phillip	DE	6-5	276	03/04/1973	12	Georgia
72	Davis, Tommy	DE	6-4	270	10/18/1982	0	North Carolina
92	Evans, Demetric	DE	6-3	275	09/03/1979	6	Georgia
64	Golston, Kedric	DT	6-4	320	05/30/1983	2	Georgia
96	Griffin, Cornelius	DT	6-3	311	12/03/1976	8	Alabama
97	Huntley, Kevin	DE	6-7	270	04/08/1982	2	Kansas State
94	Montgomery, Anthony	DT	6-5	312	03/08/1984	2	Minnesota
95	Wilson, Chris	DE	6-4	241	07/10/1982	1	Northwood (MI)

#	DEFENSIVE BACKS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
37	Doughty, Reed	S	6-1	208	11/04/1982	2	Northern Colorado
25	Eubanks, John	CB	5-10	173	07/13/1983	2	Southern Miss
39	Fox, Vernon	S	5-10	203	10/09/1979	6	Fresno State
32	Jackson, Eddie	CB	6-0	200	12/19/1980	4	Arkansas
30	Landry, LaRon	S	6-2	213	10/14/1984	1	LSU
22	Rogers, Carlos	CB	5-11	199	07/02/1981	3	Auburn
27	Smoot, Fred	CB	5-11	192	04/17/1979	7	Mississippi State
24	Springs, Shawn	CB	6-0	204	03/11/1975	11	Ohio State
29	Torrence, Leigh	CB	6-0	179	01/04/1982	2	Stanford
34	Westbrook, Byron	CB	5-10	194	12/26/1984	0	Salisbury University

#	LINEBACKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
54	Blades, H.B.	LB	5-10	236	09/30/1984	1	Pittsburgh
50	Campbell, Khary	LB	6-3	232	04/04/1979	6	Bowling Green
59	Fletcher, London	LB	5-10	245	05/19/1975	10	John Carroll
52	McIntosh, Rocky	LB	6-2	231	11/15/1982	2	Miami (FL)
58	Sinclair, Matt	LB	6-2	245	07/24/1982	1	Illinois
51	Verdun Wheeler, Danny	LB	6-2	248	03/16/1985	0	Georgia
55	Wallace, Rian	LB	6-3	243	05/24/1982	2	Temple
53	Washington, Marcus	LB	6-3	250	10/17/1977	8	Auburn

#	KICKERS		HT	WT	BORN	EXP	COLLEGE
4	Frost, Derrick	P	6-4	208	11/25/1980	4	Northern Iowa
6	Suisham, Shaun	K	6-0	205	12/29/1981	3	Bowling Green

JIM ZORN, *Head coach*

Sherman Smith, off. coord.; **Greg Blache**, def. coord.; **Joe Bugel**, asst. head coach-offense; **Stump Mitchell**, asst. head coach/running backs; **Rennie Simmons**, tight ends; **Stan Hixon**, wide receivers; **John Palermo**, def. line; **Kirk Olivadotti**, linebackers; **Jerry Gray**, secondary/cornerbacks; **Steve Jackson**, passing game coord./safeties; **Danny Smith**, special teams

The right side of the line is where the questions begin. Tackle Jon Jansen started the season opener in 2007 but fractured his ankle in that game and was lost for the year. It was the second time in four years Jansen has missed nearly an entire season due to an injury.

Guard Randy Thomas suffered a torn triceps muscle in Washington's second game of the season. He tried to come back late in the year but was not effective. Thomas has played a full season just once in the last four years.

Pete Kendall is a solid left guard. However, he is 34, has chronically sore knees and needs time off during the week. Chris Samuels, 30, is the one lineman who has been able to avoid serious injuries and get better with age. Help could be coming down the pipeline. Stephon Heyer showed potential as a rookie last year. He was overmatched in the playoff game against Seattle defensive end Patrick Kerney, but if Heyer progresses normally in his second year, he will eventually become a starter. Jason Fabini gave a solid performance in relief of Thomas last season and should have at least one more good year in him. **GRADE: B**

DEFENSE

After four years as the defensive line coach, Greg Blache takes over as Washington's defensive coordinator. Blache believes in an aggressive defense. He expects his defensive line to provide pass-rush pressure and wants a big push up the middle from the tackles. In run defense, Blache expects the front four to strip away the interference or occupy blockers so the linebackers can come in and clean up. Blache has always done an excellent job of preparing his players for almost everything they will see an opponent do.

Defensive line Age also is an issue here, especially with defensive tackle Cornelius Griffin and defensive end Phillip Daniels. Griffin is 31, while Daniels is 35. When he's healthy, Griffin is the anchor of the line. He plays with a good base, occupies blockers and pushes the pocket. Injuries are a concern, though. If he can avoid getting hurt, Griffin should have another good season.

Few players know their bodies better than Daniels. He can play either side and slide to tackle in emergencies. He's still solid against the run. Demetric Evans is a capable backup at both ends, and deserves more playing time on the left side this season.

Andre Carter had something of a breakout year in 2007 with 10.5 sacks. He has done a good job of developing a second move when he's stopped on his initial charge.

While Griffin is in the latter portion of his career, Anthony Montgomery and Kedric Golston have large upsides at tackle.

OFFSEASON MOVES

ADDITIONS:
WR **Jerome Mathis** *(FA/Texans)*

SUBTRACTIONS:
WR **Brandon Lloyd** *(FA/Bears)*, G **Mike Pucillo** *(FA)*, WR **Reche Caldwell** *(FA/Rams)*, T **Rick DeMulling** *(FA)*, DB **David Macklin** *(FA/Rams)*, DB **Pierson Prioleau** *(FA/Jaguars)*, DB **Omar Stoutmire** *(FA)*, OLB **Randall Godfrey** *(FA)*, TE **Brian Kozlowski** *(FA)*, QB **Mark Brunell** *(FA/Saints)*, WR **Keenan McCardell** *(FA)*

INSIDE THE HEADSET

HEADSHOT COURTESY NFL

JIM ZORN

Jim Zorn has never been a head coach and hasn't even called the plays, so it's difficult to know his tendencies. He likes the passing game, but early on should defer to the run if he thinks Jason Campbell and the receivers need more time to develop their chemistry. Zorn seems to favor an attacking offense.

FANTASY SPIN

http://fantasygames.sportingnews.com/football

COOLEY

CAMPBELL

MOSS

Clinton Portis has scored at least 11 TDs in four of his six NFL seasons. And he also set a career high in receptions last season with 47.

BUY Chris Cooley, TE

SELL Jason Campbell, QB

SLEEPER Santana Moss, WR

2007 FINAL STATS

DATE	W/L	SCORE	OPPONENT
09/09	W	16-13	Miami Dolphins
09/17	W	20-12	at Philadelphia Eagles
09/23	L	17-24	New York Giants
10/07	W	34-3	Detroit Lions
10/14	L	14-17	at Green Bay Packers
10/21	W	21-19	Arizona Cardinals
10/28	L	7-52	at New England Patriots
11/04	W	23-20	at New York Jets
11/11	L	25-33	Philadelphia Eagles
11/18	L	23-28	at Dallas Cowboys
11/25	L	13-19	at Tampa Bay Buccaneers
12/02	L	16-17	Buffalo Bills
12/06	W	24-16	Chicago Bears
12/16	W	22-10	at New York Giants
12/23	W	32-21	at Minnesota Vikings
12/30	W	27-6	Dallas Cowboys

WON 9, LOST 7

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Portis	325	1262	3.9	32	11
Betts	93	335	3.6	20	1
Campbell	36	185	5.1	29	1
Sellers	26	78	3.0	15	2
Moss	3	13	4.3	11	0
Collins	8	1	0.1	4	0
Cartwright	2	0	0.0	1	0
Frost	1	0	0.0	0	0
Randle El	4	-3	-0.8	1	0
REDSKINS	**498**	**1871**	**3.8**	**32**	**15**
OPPONENTS	391	1460	3.7	27	10

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Cooley	66	786	11.9	39t	8
Moss	61	808	13.2	49	3
Randle El	51	728	14.3	54	1
Portis	47	389	8.3	54	0
McCardell	22	256	11.6	32	1
Betts	21	174	8.3	28	1
Sellers	17	117	6.9	24	1
Caldwell	15	141	9.4	19	0
Thrash	9	107	11.9	31	2
Yoder	7	97	13.9	30	1
Lloyd	2	14	7.0	9	0
Kozlowski	1	5	5.0	5	0
REDSKINS	**319**	**3622**	**11.4**	**54**	**18**
OPPONENTS	351	3622	10.3	60	20

PASSING	ATT	CMP	YDS	TD	INT
Campbell	417	250	2700	12	11
Collins	105	67	888	5	0
Randle El	2	1	19	0	0
Portis	1	1	15	1	0
REDSKINS	**525**	**319**	**3622**	**18**	**11**
OPPONENTS	602	351	3622	20	14

SACKS REDSKINS 33, OPPONENTS 29

Carter 10.5, Washington 5, Wilson 4, McIntosh 3, Daniels 2.5, Griffin 2.5, Landry 1.5, Evans 1, Golston 1, Torrence 1, Doughty 0.5, Montgomery 0.5

HEADSHOTS COURTESY NFL

Montgomery needs to improve as much in 2008 as he did between his rookie year and second season. If he does that, he's capable of becoming a dominant performer. Golston is more of a backup. **GRADE: B**

Linebackers » London Fletcher is entering his 11th season, and is still a highly effective middle linebacker. He makes tackles from sideline to sideline, excels at getting the players around him lined up correctly and demands accountability from himself and his teammates. Fletcher improved the defense last year, and will continue to do so in 2008.

Marcus Washington has a few things to prove at strongside linebacker. He's been slowed by injuries the past two seasons, and if he doesn't play well this year, questions about his durability will move to the forefront. However, Washington is a high motor guy who should be able to bounce back this season. It will help if he can stay at his natural position full-time and not be shifted between pass rusher and linebacker.

Rocky McIntosh is a concern. He's coming back from major reconstructive knee surgery and has a history of knee problems going back to his college career. When on the field, he is a force as a tackler and has a knack for being around the ball when it pops loose. **GRADE: B**

Secondary » Depth and quality are two major issues with this group. Shawn Springs remains the team's top cornerback, when he's healthy. Fred Smoot starts, but he's not playing like a starter anymore, and Carlos Rogers is coming back from major knee surgery. Rogers probably won't be available until the regular season begins.

Springs, 33, is still steady in man coverage and smart in zone coverage. Smoot makes fewer mistakes and has improved his tackling; however, he is vulnerable in space. Leigh Torrence is an adequate nickel corner, but has trouble containing receivers at the line in press coverages. The addition of Justin Tryon might be beneficial, although it's difficult to say a fourth-round draft choice is going to have an immediate impact at any position. This is a decent unit when everyone is healthy and on top of their assignments. But it's not a group that is going to create a lot of coverage sacks.

The safety spot is thin, even with one of the best defensive players in the league. LaRon Landry came in as a rookie last year and was everything the Redskins hoped he would be. Landry became even more than Washington could have hoped for after the death of Sean Taylor. Landry's strong play earned him the starting free safety spot in 2008, with Reed Doughty handling strong safety. Eventually they will need to find a playmaking free safety so Landry can move back to strong, his best position. **GRADE: B-**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Cartwright has been a very capable kickoff returner, but the team seems interested in letting Jerome Mathis challenge for the job this season. Randle El is a threat to break every punt for a touchdown. However, teams have been able to contain him in recent years, and there's no reason to think that will change.

Punter Derrick Frost started strong last season but finished less than that. Washington drafted Durant Brooks as a possible replacement. Special-teams coach Danny Smith wants to see the punt game improved, either by challenging Frost to be better or inserting Brooks as the new starter.

Shaun Suisham had several game-winning kicks early in the year, but he ended the season by missing a crucial 30-yard field goal in the first-round playoff game against Seattle. He can't afford such misses this season. Long snapper Ethan Albright is accurate, consistent and unflappable. **GRADE: B-**

BOTTOM LINE

Zorn will need some time to learn how to handle all the things that engulf a head coach once the season begins. It could get shaky right off the bat with the tough early slate away from home, and closing the season with three of four games on the road is not in the Redskins' favor, either. Zorn, however, does not seem to be the type of coach who panics, and Washington's players have shown in the past they never think the season is over, no matter how bad things look early on. Still, the NFC East is a tough division, and it's hard to see where the Redskins made dramatic improvements.

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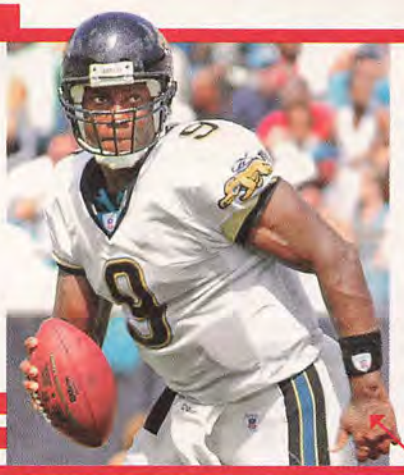
FINAL GRADE

STOCK REPORT

STEADY



2007 AFC STATS

TEAM SCORING

TEAM	TD	TDR	TDP	TDM	XP	XPA	2PT	2PTA	FG	FGA	SAF	POINTS
New England	75	17	50	8	74	74	1	1	21	24	0	589
Indianapolis	54	19	32	3	49	51	2	3	23	29	2	450
San Diego	49	19	22	8	46	46	0	2	24	27	0	412
Jacksonville	50	18	28	4	46	48	1	2	21	24	0	411
Cleveland	46	13	29	4	42	43	2	3	26	30	1	402
Pittsburgh	46	9	34	3	44	44	2	2	23	25	0	393
Cincinnati	41	10	26	5	37	38	1	3	31	34	1	380
Houston	43	12	24	7	40	40	3	3	25	29	0	379
Denver	34	10	21	3	33	33	0	1	27	31	1	320
Tennessee	28	17	9	2	28	28	0	0	35	39	0	301
Oakland	30	11	17	2	28	28	2	2	23	32	1	283
Baltimore	28	11	13	4	26	26	0	2	27	32	0	275
New York	26	6	15	5	23	24	1	2	29	36	0	268
Miami	29	14	12	3	26	26	2	2	21	23	0	267
Buffalo	25	8	12	5	24	24	1	1	24	27	2	252
Kansas City	24	6	17	1	21	21	1	3	19	27	1	226
AFC AVERAGE	39.3	12.5	22.6	4.2	36.7	37.1	1.2	2.0	24.9	29.3	0.6	350.5

PASSING

241+ ATTEMPTS	TEAM	ATT	COMP	PCT	YDS	AVG	TD	TD%	LONG	INT	INT%	SACKS	LOSS	RATING
Tom Brady	NE	578	398	68.9	4806	8.31	50	8.7	69t	8	1.4	21	128	117.2
Ben Roethlisberger	PIT	404	264	65.3	3154	7.81	32	7.9	83	11	2.7	47	347	104.1
DAVID GARRARD	JAC	325	208	64.0	2509	7.72	18	5.5	59t	3	0.9	21	99	102.2
Peyton Manning	IND	515	337	65.4	4040	7.84	31	6.0	73t	14	2.7	21	124	98.0
Jay Cutler	DEN	467	297	63.6	3497	7.49	20	4.3	68t	14	3.0	27	153	88.1
Matt Schaub	HOU	289	192	66.4	2241	7.75	9	3.1	77t	9	3.1	16	126	87.2
Carson Palmer	CIN	575	373	64.9	4131	7.18	26	4.5	70t	20	3.5	17	119	86.7
Chad Pennington	NYJ	260	179	68.8	1765	6.79	10	3.8	57t	9	3.5	26	178	86.1
Derek Anderson	CLE	527	298	56.5	3787	7.19	29	5.5	78t	19	3.6	14	109	82.5
Philip Rivers	SD	460	277	60.2	3152	6.85	21	4.6	49t	15	3.3	22	163	82.4
Damon Huard	KC	332	206	62.0	2257	6.80	11	3.3	58	13	3.9	36	234	76.8
Kyle Boller	BAL	275	168	61.1	1743	6.34	9	3.3	53	10	3.6	24	159	75.2
Vince Young	TEN	382	238	62.3	2546	6.66	9	2.4	73	17	4.5	25	157	71.1
Cleo Lemon	MIA	309	173	56.0	1773	5.74	6	1.9	64t	6	1.9	25	166	71.0
Trent Edwards	BUF	269	151	56.1	1630	6.06	7	2.6	70t	8	3.0	12	105	70.4
Kellen Clemens	NYJ	250	130	52.0	1529	6.12	5	2.0	56	10	4.0	27	138	60.9

NET PUNTING

43+ PUNTS	TEAM	NO	YARDS	LONG	AVG	TB	BLK	OPP RET	RET YDS	IN 20	NET AVG
Shane Lechler	OAK	73	3585	70	49.1	7	0	40	445	25	41.1
Mike Scifres	SD	81	3735	70	46.1	9	1	29	311	36	39.6
Dustin Colquitt	KC	95	4322	81	45.5	9	1	50	387	27	39.1
Matt Turk	HOU	55	2296	59	41.7	3	0	19	151	24	37.9
Daniel Sepulveda	PIT	68	2880	59	42.4	2	0	31	266	28	37.9
Brian Moorman	BUF	81	3302	75	40.8	3	0	37	196	30	37.6
Adam Podlesh	JAC	54	2249	76	41.6	2	0	28	218	14	36.9
Brandon Fields	MIA	77	3327	61	43.2	6	0	39	387	10	36.6
Ben Graham	NYJ	66	2855	62	43.3	7	1	31	262	23	36.6
Craig Hentrich	TEN	70	2939	66	42.0	6	0	30	264	24	36.5
Chris Hanson	NE	44	1821	64	41.4	6	1	14	75	13	36.1
Todd Sauerbrun	DEN	47	2200	65	46.8	6	2	28	313	14	36.1
Sam Koch	BAL	78	3397	64	43.6	9	1	38	375	20	36.0
Kyle Larson	CIN	59	2437	55	41.3	3	0	33	299	21	35.2
Dave Zastudil	CLE	49	2046	64	41.8	4	0	26	272	14	34.6
Hunter Smith	IND	52	2181	63	41.9	5	0	22	305	18	34.2

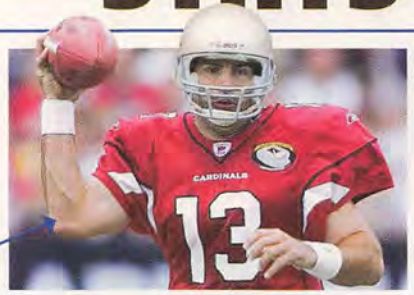
SCORING

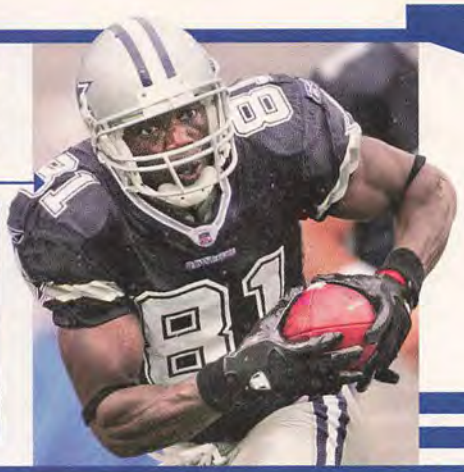
KICKERS	TEAM	XP	XPA	FG	FGA	PTS
Stephen Gostkowski	NE	74	74	21	24	137
Rob Bironas	TEN	28	28	35	39	133
Shayne Graham	CIN	37	37	31	34	130
Phil Dawson	CLE	42	43	26	30	120
Nate Kaeding	SD	46	46	24	27	118
Adam Vinatieri	IND	49	51	23	29	118
Kris Brown	HOU	40	40	25	29	115
Jason Elam	DEN	33	33	27	31	114
Jeff Reed	PIT	44	44	23	25	113
Mike Nugent	NYJ	23	24	29	36	110
Matt Stover	BAL	26	26	27	32	107
Sebastian Janikowski	OAK	28	28	23	32	97
Rian Lindell	BUF	24	24	24	27	96
Jay Feely	MIA	26	26	21	23	89
John Carney	JAC-KC	27	28	12	14	63
Josh Scobee	JAC	26	27	12	13	62
Dave Rayner	KC-SD	14	14	15	22	59
Justin Medlock	KC	0	0	1	2	3

NON-KICKERS	TEAM	TD	TDR	TDP	TDM	2PT	PTS
RANDY MOSS	NE	23	0	23	0	0	138
LaDainian Tomlinson	SD	18	15	3	0	0	108
Braylon Edwards	CLE	16	0	16	0	0	96
Joseph Addai	IND	15	12	3	0	1	92
T.J. Houshmandzadeh	CIN	12	0	12	0	0	72
Dallas Clark	IND	11	0	11	0	0	66
Jamal Lewis	CLE	11	9	2	0	0	66
Maurice Jones-Drew	JAC	10	9	0	1	0	60
Reggie Williams	JAC	10	0	10	0	0	60
Reggie Wayne	IND	10	0	10	0	0	60
Antonio Gates	SD	9	0	9	0	0	54
Santonio Holmes	PIT	8	0	8	0	1	50
Willis McGahee	BAL	8	7	1	0	0	48
Wes Welker	NE	8	0	8	0	0	48
Andre Johnson	HOU	8	0	8	0	0	48
Chad Johnson	CIN	8	0	8	0	0	48
Hines Ward	PIT	7	0	7	0	1	44
Marshawn Lynch	BUF	7	7	0	0	1	44
Heath Miller	PIT	7	0	7	0	0	42
Brandon Marshall	DEN	7	0	7	0	0	42
Kenny Watson	CIN	7	7	0	0	0	42
LenDale White	TEN	7	7	0	0	0	42
Najeh Davenport	PIT	7	5	2	0	0	42
Andre Davis	HOU	6	0	3	3	1	38
Laurence Maroney	NE	6	6	0	0	1	38
Leon Washington	NYJ	6	3	0	3	1	38
Benjamin Watson	NE	6	0	6	0	0	36
Jerry Porter	OAK	6	0	6	0	0	36
Ron Dayne	HOU	6	6	0	0	0	36
Laveranues Coles	NYJ	6	0	6	0	0	36
Ronnie Brown	MIA	5	4	1	0	1	32
Kellen Winslow	CLE	5	0	5	0	1	32
Tony Scheffler	DEN	5	0	5	0	0	30
Brandon Stokley	DEN	5	0	5	0	0	30
Fred Taylor	JAC	5	5	0	0	0	30
Dwayne Bowe	KC	5	0	5	0	0	30
Chris Brown	TEN	5	5	0	0	0	30
Derrick Mason	BAL	5	0	5	0	0	30
Kevin Walter	HOU	5	0	4	1	0	30
Lee Evans	BUF	5	0	5	0	0	30
Nate Washington	PIT	5	0	5	0	0	30
Tony Gonzalez	KC	5	0	5	0	0	30
Jabar Gaffney	NE	5	0	5	0	0	30
Ronald Curry	OAK	4	0	4	0	2	28
Samkon Gado	MIA	4	4	0	0	1	26
Rudi Johnson	CIN	4	3	1	0	1	26
Larry Johnson	KC	4	3	1	0	0	24
Roydell Williams	TEN	4	0	4	0	0	24
Chris Chambers	SD	4	0	4	0	0	24
Greg Jones	JAC	4	2	2	0	0	24
Justin Fargas	OAK	4	4	0	0	0	24
Dennis Northcutt	JAC	4	0	4	0	0	24
Travis Henry	DEN	4	4	0	0	0	24
Kenton Keith	IND	4	3	1	0	0	24

(L TO R): DAVID DUROCHIK FOR SN; BOB LEVERONE / SN

2007 NFC STATS





SCORING

KICKERS	TEAM	XP	XPA	FG	FGA	PTS
Mason Crosby	GB	48	48	31	39	141
Nick Folk	DAL	53	53	26	31	131
Josh Brown	SEA	43	43	28	34	127
Robbie Gould	CHI	33	33	31	36	126
Jason Hanson	DET	35	36	29	35	122
Matt Bryant	TB	34	34	28	33	118
Shaun Suisham	WAS	29	30	29	35	116
Neil Rackers	ARI	47	48	21	30	110
Lawrence Tynes	NYG	40	42	23	27	109
David Akers	PHI	36	36	24	32	108
Morten Andersen	ATL	24	24	25	28	99
John Kasay	CAR	27	27	24	28	99
Ryan Longwell	MIN	39	40	20	24	99
Jeff Wilkins	STL	25	25	24	32	97
Joe Nedney	SF	22	22	17	19	73
Olindo Mare	NO	34	34	10	17	64
Martin Gramatica	NO	8	8	5	5	23
Matt Prater	ATL	1	1	1	4	4

NON-KICKERS	TEAM	TD	TDR	TDP	TDM	2PT	PTS
TERRELL OWENS	DAL	15	0	15	0	0	90
Adrian Peterson	MIN	13	12	1	0	0	78
Marion Barber	DAL	12	10	2	0	0	72
Plaxico Burress	NYG	12	0	12	0	0	72
Brian Westbrook	PHI	12	7	5	0	0	72
Greg Jennings	GB	12	0	12	0	0	72
Nate Burleson	SEA	11	0	9	2	0	66
Clinton Portis	WAS	11	11	0	0	0	66
Marques Colston	NO	11	0	11	0	0	66
Larry Fitzgerald	ARI	10	0	10	0	0	60
Earnest Graham	TB	10	10	0	0	0	60
Anquan Boldin	ARI	9	0	9	0	0	54
Chris Cooley	WAS	8	0	8	0	1	50
Kevin Curtis	PHI	8	0	6	2	0	48
Devin Hester	CHI	8	0	2	6	0	48
Kevin Jones	DET	8	8	0	0	0	48
Ryan Grant	GB	8	8	0	0	0	48
Torry Holt	STL	7	0	7	0	1	44
Jason Witten	DAL	7	0	7	0	0	42
Patrick Crayton	DAL	7	0	7	0	0	42
Edgerrin James	ARI	7	7	0	0	0	42
Steve Smith	CAR	7	0	7	0	0	42
Chester Taylor	MIN	7	7	0	0	0	42
Reggie Bush	NO	6	4	2	0	3	42
Donald Lee	GB	6	0	6	0	0	36
Arnaz Battle	SF	6	1	5	0	0	36
Bobby Engram	SEA	6	0	6	0	0	36
Reuben Droughns	NYG	6	6	0	0	0	36
Roddy White	ATL	6	0	6	0	0	36
Joey Galloway	TB	6	0	6	0	0	36
Brandon Jacobs	NYG	6	4	2	0	0	36
Shaun McDonald	DET	6	0	6	0	0	36
Steven Jackson	STL	6	5	1	0	0	36
Frank Gore	SF	6	5	1	0	0	36
Roy Williams	DET	5	0	5	0	0	30
Calvin Johnson	DET	5	1	4	0	0	30
Shaun Alexander	SEA	5	4	1	0	0	30
Aaron Stecker	NO	5	5	0	0	0	30
Bernard Berrian	CHI	5	0	5	0	0	30
Alge Crumpler	ATL	5	0	5	0	0	30
Maurice Morris	SEA	5	4	1	0	0	30
DeAngelo Williams	CAR	5	4	1	0	0	30
Leonard Pope	ARI	5	0	5	0	0	30
Ruvell Martin	GB	4	0	4	0	0	24
Cedric Benson	CHI	4	4	0	0	0	24
Warrick Dunn	ATL	4	4	0	0	0	24
Jerramy Stevens	TB	4	0	4	0	0	24
Sidney Rice	MIN	4	0	4	0	0	24
Drew Carter	CAR	4	0	4	0	0	24
DeShawn Wynn	GB	4	4	0	0	0	24
Reggie Brown	PHI	4	0	4	0	0	24
Desmond Clark	CHI	4	0	4	0	0	24
Isaac Bruce	STL	4	0	4	0	0	24
Correll Buckhalter	PHI	4	4	0	0	0	24

(L TO R): MICHAEL McNAMARA, ALBERT DICKSON / SN

TEAM SCORING

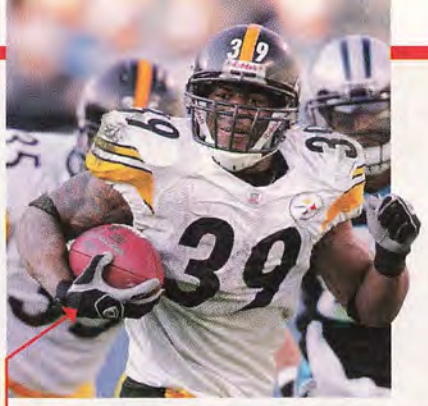
TEAM	TD	TDR	TDP	TDM	XP	XPA	2PT	2PTA	FG	FGA	SAF	POINTS
Dallas	54	14	36	4	53	53	0	1	26	31	0	455
Green Bay	49	13	30	6	48	48	0	0	31	39	0	435
Arizona	49	9	32	8	47	48	0	1	21	30	0	404
Seattle	44	9	30	5	43	43	0	1	28	34	1	393
New Orleans	47	14	28	5	42	42	4	5	15	22	1	379
New York	44	15	23	6	40	42	0	2	23	27	0	373
Minnesota	43	22	12	9	39	40	3	3	20	24	1	365
Detroit	37	13	19	5	35	36	0	1	29	35	1	346
Philadelphia	38	12	24	2	36	36	0	2	24	32	0	336
Chicago	34	8	18	8	33	33	1	1	31	36	1	334
Tampa Bay	36	15	18	3	34	34	0	2	28	33	0	334
Washington	35	15	18	2	29	30	2	5	29	35	2	334
Carolina	28	7	19	2	27	27	0	1	24	28	0	267
St. Louis	27	5	19	3	25	25	1	2	24	32	1	263
Atlanta	26	7	18	1	25	25	0	1	26	34	0	259
San Francisco	24	8	15	1	22	22	0	1	17	19	1	219
NFC AVERAGE	38.4	11.6	22.4	4.4	36.1	36.5	0.7	1.8	24.8	30.7	0.6	343.5

PASSING

241+ ATTEMPTS	TEAM	ATT	COMP	PCT	YDS	AVG	TD	TD%	LONG	INT	INT%	SACKS	LOSS	RATING
Tony Romo	DAL	520	335	64.4	4211	8.10	36	6.9	59t	19	3.7	24	176	97.4
Brett Favre	GB	535	356	66.5	4155	7.77	28	5.2	82t	15	2.8	15	93	95.7
Jeff Garcia	TB	327	209	63.9	2440	7.46	13	4.0	69t	4	1.2	19	104	94.6
Matt Hasselbeck	SEA	562	352	62.6	3966	7.06	28	5.0	65	12	2.1	33	204	91.4
Donovan McNabb	PHI	473	291	61.5	3324	7.03	19	4.0	75t	7	1.5	44	227	89.9
KURT WARNER	ARI	451	281	62.3	3417	7.58	27	6.0	62	17	3.8	20	140	89.8
Drew Brees	NO	652	440	67.5	4423	6.78	28	4.3	58	18	2.8	16	109	89.4
Jon Kitna	DET	561	355	63.3	4068	7.25	18	3.2	91t	20	3.6	51	320	80.9
Jason Campbell	WAS	417	250	60.0	2700	6.47	12	2.9	54	11	2.6	21	110	77.6
Joey Harrington	ATL	348	215	61.8	2215	6.36	7	2.0	69t	8	2.3	32	192	77.2
Brian Griese	CHI	262	161	61.5	1803	6.88	10	3.8	81t	12	4.6	15	114	75.6
Eli Manning	NYG	529	297	56.1	3336	6.31	23	4.3	60t	20	3.8	27	217	73.9
Tarvaris Jackson	MIN	294	171	58.2	1911	6.50	9	3.1	71	12	4.1	19	70	70.8
Marc Bulger	STL	378	221	58.5	2392	6.33	11	2.9	40	15	4.0	37	269	70.3

NET PUNTING

43+ PUNTS	TEAM	NO	YARDS	LONG	AVG	TB	BLK	OPP RET	RET YDS	IN 20	NET AVG
Andy Lee	SF	105	4968	74	47.3	13	0	53	402	42	41.0
Donnie Jones	STL	78	3684	80	47.2	9	0	47	440	18	39.3
Michael Koenen	ATL	88	3824	63	43.5	5	0	41	307	30	38.8
Mat McBriar	DAL	63	2970	64	47.1	7	0	35	406	17	38.5
Jason Baker	CAR	90	3978	64	44.2	5	0	54	485	22	37.7
Brad Maynard	CHI	88	3682	56	41.8	9	0	38	214	27	37.4
Jon Ryan	GB	60	2664	72	44.4	11	2	21	131	18	37.3
Josh Bidwell	TB	77	3382	61	43.9	10	1	38	280	30	37.2
Steve Weatherford	NO	63	2757	61	43.8	4	0	35	335	20	37.2
Chris Kluwe	MIN	81	3621	70	44.7	9	0	43	440	34	37.0
Nick Harris	DET	68	3010	58	44.3	5	0	36	434	26	36.4
Derrick Frost	WAS	75	3072	64	41.0	7	0	32	202	23	36.4
Jeff Feagles	NYG	71	2865	60	40.4	5	1	28	173	25	36.0
Saverio Rocca	PHI	73	3066	65	42.0	7	0	36	409	24	34.5
Ryan Plackemeier	SEA	86	3436	62	40.0	6	0	37	362	30	34.3
Mike Barr	ARI	59	2385	61	40.4	5	1	28	397	15	31.5



RUSHING

112+ YARDS	TEAM	NO	YARDS	AVG	LONG	TD
LaDainian Tomlinson	SD	315	1474	4.7	49	15
WILLIE PARKER	PIT	321	1316	4.1	32	2
Jamal Lewis	CLE	298	1304	4.4	66t	9
Willis McGahee	BAL	294	1207	4.1	46t	7
Fred Taylor	JAC	223	1202	5.4	80t	5
Thomas Jones	NYJ	310	1119	3.6	36	1
Marshawn Lynch	BUF	280	1115	4.0	56t	7
LenDale White	TEN	303	1110	3.7	28	7
Joseph Addai	IND	261	1072	4.1	23	12
Justin Fargas	OAK	222	1009	4.5	48	4
Laurence Maroney	NE	185	835	4.5	59t	6
Ron Dayne	HOU	194	773	4.0	39	6
Maurice Jones-Drew	JAC	167	768	4.6	57t	9
Kenny Watson	CIN	178	763	4.3	24	7
Selvin Young	DEN	140	729	5.2	50	1
Travis Henry	DEN	167	691	4.1	33	4
Ronnie Brown	MIA	119	602	5.1	60	4
Larry Johnson	KC	158	559	3.5	54	3
LaMont Jordan	OAK	144	549	3.8	33	3
Kenton Keith	IND	121	533	4.4	22	3
Jesse Chatman	MIA	128	515	4.0	30	1
Najeh Davenport	PIT	107	499	4.7	45	5
Rudi Johnson	CIN	170	497	2.9	22	3
Chris Brown	TEN	102	462	4.5	42	5
Kolby Smith	KC	112	407	3.6	19	2

112+ YARDS	TEAM	NO	YARDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Vince Young	TEN	93	395	4.2	21	3
Sammy Morris	NE	85	384	4.5	49	3
Leon Washington	NYJ	71	353	5.0	49	3
Michael Turner	SD	71	316	4.5	74t	1
Dominic Rhodes	OAK	75	302	4.0	25	1
Fred Jackson	BUF	58	300	5.2	27	0
Jason Wright	CLE	60	277	4.6	18	1
Kevin Faulk	NE	62	265	4.3	14	0
Musa Smith	BAL	75	264	3.5	24	2
Darius Walker	HOU	58	264	4.6	41	1
Ahman Green	HOU	70	260	3.7	18	2
Andre Hall	DEN	44	216	4.9	62t	2
Jay Cutler	DEN	44	205	4.7	31	1
Ben Roethlisberger	PIT	35	204	5.8	30t	2
David Garrard	JAC	49	185	3.8	19	1
DeDe Dorsey	CIN	21	183	8.7	45	0
Darren Sproles	SD	37	164	4.4	34	2
Samkon Gado	HOU-MIA	53	150	2.8	20t	4
Josh McCown	OAK	29	143	4.9	24	0
Jerome Harrison	CLE	23	142	6.2	17	0
Priest Holmes	KC	46	137	3.0	11	0
Lorenzo Booker	MIA	28	125	4.5	22	0
Heath Evans	NE	34	121	3.6	11	3
Greg Jones	JAC	42	119	2.8	11	2
Chris Henry	TEN	31	119	3.8	24t	2

RECEIVING

20+ CATCHES	TEAM	NO	YARDS	AVG	LONG	TD
T.J. Houshmandzadeh	CIN	112	1143	10.2	42t	12
Wes Welker	NE	112	1175	10.5	42	8
REGGIE WAYNE	IND	104	1510	14.5	64	10
Derrick Mason	BAL	103	1087	10.6	79t	5
Brandon Marshall	DEN	102	1325	13.0	68t	7
Tony Gonzalez	KC	99	1172	11.8	31	5
Randy Moss	NE	98	1493	15.2	65t	23
Chad Johnson	CIN	93	1440	15.5	70t	8
Jerricho Cotchery	NYJ	82	1130	13.8	50	2
Kellen Winslow	CLE	82	1106	13.5	49	5
Braylon Edwards	CLE	80	1289	16.1	78t	16
Antonio Gates	SD	75	984	13.1	49t	9
Hines Ward	PIT	71	732	10.3	25	7
Dwayne Bowe	KC	70	995	14.2	58	5
Chris Chambers	MIA-SD	66	970	14.7	44	4
Kevin Walter	HOU	65	800	12.3	46	4
Owen Daniels	HOU	63	768	12.2	29	3
LaDainian Tomlinson	SD	60	475	7.9	36	3
Andre Johnson	HOU	60	851	14.2	77t	8
Dallas Clark	IND	58	616	10.6	39	11
Laveranues Coles	NYJ	55	646	11.7	57t	6
Ronald Curry	OAK	55	717	13.0	49	4
Lee Evans	BUF	55	849	15.4	85t	5
Justin Gage	TEN	55	750	13.6	73	2
Roydell Williams	TEN	55	719	13.1	48	4
Kenny Watson	CIN	52	374	7.2	43	0
Santonio Holmes	PIT	52	942	18.1	83	8
Josh Reed	BUF	51	578	11.3	30	0
Joe Jurevicius	CLE	50	614	12.3	50	3
Marty Booker	MIA	50	556	11.1	26	1
Tony Scheffler	DEN	49	549	11.2	41	5
Mark Clayton	BAL	48	531	11.1	52	0

20+ CATCHES	TEAM	NO	YARDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Kevin Faulk	NE	47	383	8.1	23	1
Heath Miller	PIT	47	566	12.0	29	7
Donte' Stallworth	NE	46	697	15.2	69t	3
Bo Scaife	TEN	46	421	9.2	26	1
Ernest Wilford	JAC	45	518	11.5	35	3
Zach Miller	OAK	44	444	10.1	28	3
Dennis Northcutt	JAC	44	601	13.7	55t	4
Jerry Porter	OAK	44	705	16.0	59	6
Willis McGahee	BAL	43	231	5.4	30	1
Vincent Jackson	SD	41	623	15.2	45	3
Chris Baker	NYJ	41	409	10.0	22	3
Joseph Addai	IND	41	364	8.9	73t	3
Brandon Stokley	DEN	40	635	15.9	58	5
Maurice Jones-Drew	JAC	40	407	10.2	43	0
Ronnie Brown	MIA	39	389	10.0	43	1
Reggie Williams	JAC	38	629	16.6	80t	10
Anthony Gonzalez	IND	37	576	15.6	57t	3
Marcedes Lewis	JAC	37	391	10.6	25	2
Benjamin Watson	NE	36	389	10.8	35	6
Leon Washington	NYJ	36	213	5.9	18	0
Jabar Gaffney	NE	36	449	12.5	56t	5
Roscoe Parrish	BUF	35	352	10.1	47t	1
Selvin Young	DEN	35	231	6.6	24	0
David Martin	MIA	34	303	8.9	28	2
Quinn Sypniewski	BAL	34	246	7.2	13	1
Ted Ginn Jr.	MIA	34	420	12.4	54	2
Andre Davis	HOU	33	583	17.7	53t	3
Eric Moulds	TEN	32	342	10.7	46	0
Brad Smith	NYJ	32	325	10.2	29	2
Ben Utecht	IND	31	364	11.7	30	1
Larry Johnson	KC	30	186	6.2	30t	1
Jamal Lewis	CLE	30	248	8.3	34	2

20+ CATCHES	TEAM	NO	YARDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Nate Washington	PIT	29	450	15.5	40	5
Justin Peelle	MIA	29	228	7.9	35	2
Derek Hagan	MIA	29	373	12.9	22t	2
Lorenzo Booker	MIA	28	237	8.5	22	0
LaMont Jordan	OAK	28	247	8.8	27	0
Jeff Webb	KC	28	313	11.2	32	1
Thomas Jones	NYJ	28	217	7.8	25	1
Jesse Chatman	MIA	27	161	6.0	22	0
Musa Smith	BAL	27	192	7.1	29	0
Javon Walker	DEN	26	287	11.0	24	0
Justin Griffith	OAK	26	165	6.3	29	1
Michael Gaines	BUF	25	215	8.6	20	2
Vonta Leach	HOU	25	108	4.3	15	2
Robert Royal	BUF	25	248	9.9	28t	3
Matt Jones	JAC	24	317	13.2	48	4
Jason Wright	CLE	24	233	9.7	23	0
Kris Wilson	KC	24	180	7.5	31	1
Daniel Graham	DEN	24	246	10.3	28	2
Samie Parker	KC	24	298	12.4	24	2
Justin Fargas	OAK	23	188	8.2	17	0
Todd Heap	BAL	23	239	10.4	37	1
Willie Parker	PIT	23	164	7.1	22	0
Kolby Smith	KC	22	148	6.7	17	0
Fred Jackson	BUF	22	190	8.6	54	0
Brandon Jones	TEN	21	248	11.8	35t	2
Chris Henry	CIN	21	343	16.3	52t	2
Marvin Harrison	IND	20	247	12.4	42	1
Reggie Kelly	CIN	20	211	10.6	26	0
Craig Davis	SD	20	188	9.4	18	1
LenDale White	TEN	20	114	5.7	15	0
Demetrius Williams	BAL	20	290	14.5	34	0

BOB LEVERONE / SN (2)

RUSHING

112+ YARDS	TEAM	NO	YARDS	AVG	LONG	TD
ADRIAN PETERSON	MIN	238	1341	5.6	73t	12
Brian Westbrook	PHI	278	1333	4.8	36	7
Clinton Portis	WAS	325	1262	3.9	32	11
Edgerrin James	ARI	324	1222	3.8	27	7
Frank Gore	SF	260	1102	4.2	43t	5
Brandon Jacobs	NYG	202	1009	5.0	43t	4
Steven Jackson	STL	237	1002	4.2	54	5
Marion Barber	DAL	204	975	4.8	54	10
Ryan Grant	GB	188	956	5.1	66t	8
Earnest Graham	TB	222	898	4.0	28t	10
DeShaun Foster	CAR	247	876	3.5	20	3
Chester Taylor	MIN	157	844	5.4	84t	7
Warrick Dunn	ATL	227	720	3.2	38	4
DeAngelo Williams	CAR	144	717	5.0	75	4
Shaun Alexander	SEA	207	716	3.5	25	4
Cedric Benson	CHI	196	674	3.4	43t	4
Maurice Morris	SEA	140	628	4.5	46	4
Jerious Norwood	ATL	103	613	6.0	67t	1
Derrick Ward	NYG	125	602	4.8	44	3
Julius Jones	DAL	164	588	3.6	25	2
Kevin Jones	DET	153	581	3.8	34	8
Reggie Bush	NO	157	581	3.7	22	4
Adrian Peterson	CHI	151	510	3.4	21	3
Aaron Stecker	NO	115	448	3.9	26	5

112+ YARDS	TEAM	NO	YARDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Ladell Betts	WAS	93	335	3.6	20	1
T.J. Duckett	DET	65	335	5.2	53	3
Correll Buckhalter	PHI	62	313	5.0	30t	4
Brian Leonard	STL	86	303	3.5	31	0
Michael Pittman	TB	68	286	4.2	29	0
Reuben Droughns	NYG	85	275	3.2	45	6
Brandon Jackson	GB	75	267	3.6	46	1
Tarvaris Jackson	MIN	54	260	4.8	32	3
Pierre Thomas	NO	52	252	4.8	24t	1
Donovan McNabb	PHI	50	236	4.7	40	0
Carnell Williams	TB	54	208	3.9	20	3
DeShawn Wynn	GB	50	203	4.1	44	4
Ahmad Bradshaw	NYG	23	190	8.3	88t	1
Michael Bennett	TB	41	189	4.6	28	1
Jason Campbell	WAS	36	185	5.1	29	1
Tatum Bell	DET	44	182	4.1	24	1
Leonard Weaver	SEA	33	146	4.4	37	1
Antonio Pittman	STL	38	139	3.7	43	0
Tony Romo	DAL	31	129	4.2	17	2
Michael Robinson	SF	26	121	4.7	28	0
Luke McCown	TB	12	117	9.8	31	0
Maurice Hicks	SF	21	117	5.6	18	1
Jeff Garcia	TB	35	116	3.3	21	1
Mewelde Moore	MIN	20	113	5.7	17	0

RECEIVING

20+ CATCHES	TEAM	NO	YARDS	AVG	LONG	TD
LARRY FITZGERALD	ARI	100	1409	14.1	48t	10
Marques Colston	NO	98	1202	12.3	45	11
Jason Witten	DAL	96	1145	11.9	53	7
Bobby Engram	SEA	94	1147	12.2	49	6
Torry Holt	STL	93	1189	12.8	40	7
Brian Westbrook	PHI	90	771	8.6	57t	5
Steve Smith	CAR	87	1002	11.5	74t	7
Roddy White	ATL	83	1202	14.5	69t	6
Donald Driver	GB	82	1048	12.8	47	2
Terrell Owens	DAL	81	1355	16.7	52t	15
Shaun McDonald	DET	79	943	11.9	49t	6
Kevin Curtis	PHI	77	1110	14.4	75t	6
Reggie Bush	NO	73	417	5.7	25	2
Bernard Berrian	CHI	71	951	13.4	59t	5
Anquan Boldin	ARI	71	853	12.0	44t	9
Plaxico Burress	NYG	70	1025	14.6	60t	12
Chris Cooley	WAS	66	786	11.9	39t	8
Roy Williams	DET	64	838	13.1	91t	5
Ike Hilliard	TB	62	722	11.6	56	1
Reggie Brown	PHI	61	780	12.8	45t	4
Mike Furrey	DET	61	664	10.9	49	1
Santana Moss	WAS	61	808	13.2	49	3
Amani Toomer	NYG	59	760	12.9	40	3
Jeremy Shockey	NYG	57	619	10.9	29	3
Joey Galloway	TB	57	1014	17.8	69t	6
Isaac Bruce	STL	55	733	13.3	37	4
Bobby Wade	MIN	54	647	12.0	40	3
David Patten	NO	54	792	14.7	58	3
Greg Jennings	GB	53	920	17.4	82t	12
Michael Jenkins	ATL	53	532	10.0	29	4
Frank Gore	SF	53	436	8.2	23t	1
Vernon Davis	SF	52	509	9.8	31	4

20+ CATCHES	TEAM	NO	YARDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Adrian Peterson	CHI	51	420	8.2	30	0
Antwaan Randle El	WAS	51	728	14.3	54	1
Arnaz Battle	SF	50	600	12.0	57t	5
Nate Burleson	SEA	50	694	13.9	45t	9
Patrick Crayton	DAL	50	697	13.9	59t	7
Deion Branch	SEA	49	661	13.5	65	4
Earnest Graham	TB	49	324	6.6	21	0
Calvin Johnson	DET	48	756	15.8	49	4
Donald Lee	GB	48	575	12.0	60	6
Eric Johnson	NO	48	378	7.9	22	2
Clinton Portis	WAS	47	389	8.3	54	0
James Jones	GB	47	676	14.4	79t	2
Jeff King	CAR	46	406	8.8	29	2
Darrell Jackson	SF	46	497	10.8	34	3
Bryant Johnson	ARI	46	528	11.5	30	2
Desmond Clark	CHI	44	545	12.4	52	4
Marion Barber	DAL	44	282	6.4	29	2
Alge Crumpler	ATL	42	444	10.6	55t	5
Muhsin Muhammad	CHI	40	570	14.3	44	3
Leonard Weaver	SEA	39	313	8.0	46	0
Randy McMichael	STL	39	429	11.0	29t	3
Greg Olsen	CHI	39	391	10.0	31	2
Steven Jackson	STL	38	271	7.1	37	1
Drew Carter	CAR	38	517	13.6	49	4
Laurent Robinson	ATL	37	437	11.8	74t	1
Warrick Dunn	ATL	37	238	6.4	35	0
Aaron Stecker	NO	36	211	5.9	26	0
Drew Bennett	STL	33	375	11.4	24	3
Keary Colbert	CAR	32	332	10.4	43	0
D.J. Hackett	SEA	32	384	12.0	59	3
Alex Smith	TB	32	385	12.0	33	3
Robert Ferguson	MIN	32	391	12.2	71	1

20+ CATCHES	TEAM	NO	YARDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Lance Moore	NO	32	302	9.4	22	2
Kevin Jones	DET	32	197	6.2	16	0
Sidney Rice	MIN	31	396	12.8	60t	4
Brian Leonard	STL	30	183	6.1	16	0
RYAN GRANT	GB	30	145	4.8	21	0
Vernand Morency	GB	30	199	6.6	18	0
J.J. Arrington	ARI	29	241	8.3	32	1
Chester Taylor	MIN	29	281	9.7	50	0
Jerious Norwood	ATL	28	277	9.9	46	0
Marcus Pollard	SEA	28	273	9.8	22	2
Joe Horn	ATL	27	243	9.0	26	1
Billy Miller	NO	27	328	12.1	57	2
Visanthe Shiancoe	MIN	27	323	12.0	79	1
Michael Pittman	TB	26	191	7.3	16	0
Derrick Ward	NYG	26	179	6.9	17	1
DeShaun Foster	CAR	25	182	7.3	23	1
Edgerrin James	ARI	24	204	8.5	26	0
Brandon Jacobs	NYG	23	174	7.6	34	2
Maurice Morris	SEA	23	213	9.3	34t	1
Julius Jones	DAL	23	203	8.8	24	0
Jason Avant	PHI	23	267	11.6	31	2
Leonard Pope	ARI	23	238	10.3	31	5
DeAngelo Williams	CAR	23	175	7.6	30	1
Keenan McCardell	WAS	22	256	11.6	32	1
L.J. Smith	PHI	22	236	10.7	26	1
Michael Clayton	TB	22	301	13.7	39	0
Jerheme Urban	ARI	22	329	15.0	42	2
Ladell Betts	WAS	21	174	8.3	28	1
Koren Robinson	GB	21	241	11.5	43	1
Delanie Walker	SF	21	174	8.3	26	1
Sinorice Moss	NYG	21	225	10.7	20	0
Devin Hester	CHI	20	299	15.0	81t	2
Devery Henderson	NO	20	409	20.5	54	3

PETERSON, GRANT: ALBERT DICKSON / SN; FITZGERALD: MICHAEL McNAMARA / SN

INTERCEPTIONS

2+ INTERCEPTIONS	TEAM	NO	YARDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Antonio Cromartie	SD	10	144	14.4	70t	1
Ed Reed	BAL	7	130	18.6	32	0
Thomas Howard	OAK	6	172	28.7	66t	2
Asante Samuel	NE	6	89	14.8	42	1
Leigh Bodden	CLE	6	75	12.5	26	0
Kerry Rhodes	NYJ	5	76	15.2	36	0
Reggie Nelson	JAC	5	76	15.2	37	0
Clinton Hart	SD	5	73	14.6	22	0
Dré Bly	DEN	5	71	14.2	37	0
Keith Bulluck	TEN	5	63	12.6	35	0
Sean Jones	CLE	5	37	7.4	26	0
Leon Hall	CIN	5	16	3.2	12	0
Gary Brackett	IND	4	128	32.0	49	0
Kirk Morrison	OAK	4	94	23.5	45	0
Johnathan Joseph	CIN	4	76	19.0	42t	1
Antoine Bethea	IND	4	47	11.8	30	0
Sammy Knight	JAC	4	31	7.8	15	0
Terrence McGee	BUF	4	4	1.0	2	0
Nick Harper	TEN	3	62	20.7	32	0
Ike Taylor	PIT	3	56	18.7	51t	1
Randall Gay	NE	3	52	17.3	31	0
Fred Bennett	HOU	3	47	15.7	33	0
Chinedum Ndukwe	CIN	3	44	14.7	44	0

2+ INTERCEPTIONS	TEAM	NO	YARDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Jarrad Page	KC	3	37	12.3	37	0
Stanford Routt	OAK	3	31	10.3	31	0
Junior Seau	NE	3	28	9.3	23	0
Darrelle Revis	NYJ	3	20	6.7	19	0
Marlon McCree	SD	3	20	6.7	19	0
Kelvin Hayden	IND	3	17	5.7	20	0
Jason Allen	MIA	3	15	5.0	13	0
Matt Wilhelm	SD	3	11	3.7	7	0
Brian Williams	JAC	3	10	3.3	6	0
Michael Griffin	TEN	3	3	1.0	3	0
Champ Bailey	DEN	3	3	1.0	3	0
Vincent Fuller	TEN	2	137	68.5	76t	2
Brodney Pool	CLE	2	103	51.5	100t	1
Matt Giordano	IND	2	89	44.5	83t	1
Jim Leonhard	BUF	2	60	30.0	36	0
Anthony Smith	PIT	2	50	25.0	50	0
Chris Hope	TEN	2	45	22.5	45	0
Deshea Townsend	PIT	2	44	22.0	23	0
James Sanders	NE	2	43	21.5	42	0
Madieu Williams	CIN	2	40	20.0	35	0
Shaun Phillips	SD	2	36	18.0	18t	1
Ray Lewis	BAL	2	35	17.5	35t	1
Bob Sanders	IND	2	32	16.0	29	0

2+ INTERCEPTIONS	TEAM	NO	YARDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Rocky Boiman	IND	2	28	14.0	26	0
Patrick Surtain	KC	2	25	12.5	23	0
George Wilson	BUF	2	25	12.5	25t	1
Stephen Cooper	SD	2	23	11.5	18	0
Bernard Pollard	KC	2	23	11.5	21	0
André Goodman	MIA	2	23	11.5	18	0
David Pittman	BAL	2	21	10.5	29	0
Joey Porter	MIA	2	19	9.5	14	0
Calvin Lowry	TEN	2	18	9.0	17	0
Derrick Johnson	KC	2	18	9.0	12	0
David Thornton	TEN	2	16	8.0	11	0
Hank Poteat	NYJ	2	11	5.5	11	0
Stuart Schweigert	OAK	2	10	5.0	10	0
Dexter Jackson	CIN	2	7	3.5	7	0
Dunta Robinson	HOU	2	6	3.0	10	0
Drayton Florence	SD	2	4	2.0	4	0
Derrick Martin	BAL	2	3	1.5	3	0
Clint Session	IND	2	3	1.5	3	0
Ty Law	KC	2	2	1.0	2	0
Jabari Greer	BUF	2	1	0.5	2	0
Derrick Pope	MIA	2	0	0.0	0	0
Karl Paymah	DEN	2	0	0.0	0	0
Brandon McDonald	CLE	2	0	0.0	0	0

SACKS

4.0+ SACKS	TEAM	NO
Jared Allen	KC	15.5
Mario Williams	HOU	14.0
Mike Vrabel	NE	12.5
Shawne Merriman	SD	12.5
Elvis Dumervil	DEN	12.5
Kyle Vanden Bosch	TEN	12.0
Jason Taylor	MIA	11.0
James Harrison	PIT	8.5
Shaun Phillips	SD	8.5
Chris Clemons	OAK	8.0
Antwan Odom	TEN	8.0
Derrick Burgess	OAK	8.0
Tamba Hali	KC	7.5
Paul Spicer	JAC	7.5
Robert Mathis	IND	7.0
Jarvis Green	NE	6.5
Aaron Schobel	BUF	6.5
James Farrior	PIT	6.5
Adalius Thomas	NE	6.5
Travis LaBoy	TEN	6.0
Albert Haynesworth	TEN	6.0
Joey Porter	MIA	5.5
Amobi Okoye	HOU	5.5
Shaun Ellis	NYJ	5.0
Terrell Suggs	BAL	5.0
David Harris	NYJ	5.0
Kamerion Wimbley	CLE	5.0
Tim Crowder	DEN	4.0
Dewayne Robertson	NYJ	4.0
Gerard Warren	OAK	4.0
Derrick Johnson	KC	4.0
Rob Meier	JAC	4.0
LaMarr Woodley	PIT	4.0
Tony Brown	TEN	4.0
Leon Williams	CLE	4.0
Clark Haggans	PIT	4.0
Rosevelt Colvin	NE	4.0
Ty Warren	NE	4.0
Antwan Peek	CLE	4.0
Robaire Smith	CLE	4.0

KICK RETURNS

20+ RETURNS	TEAM	NO	YARDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Joshua Cribbs	CLE	59	1809	30.7	100t	2
Andre Davis	HOU	32	968	30.3	104t	3
Leon Washington	NYJ	47	1291	27.5	98t	3
Darren Sproles	SD	37	1008	27.2	89t	1
Maurice Jones-Drew	JAC	31	811	26.2	100t	1
Ellis Hobbs	NE	35	911	26.0	108t	1
Yamon Figurs	BAL	46	1138	24.7	94t	1
Glenn Holt	CIN	59	1432	24.3	100t	1
Terrence McGee	BUF	45	1082	24.0	103t	1
Dexter Wynn	HOU	22	523	23.8	39	0
Allen Rossum	PIT	38	885	23.3	98t	1
T.J. Rushing	IND	31	714	23.0	47	0
Ted Ginn Jr.	MIA	63	1433	22.7	52	0
Chris Carr	OAK	59	1327	22.5	43	0
Eddie Drummond	KC	37	785	21.2	39	0

PUNT RETURNS

21+ RETURNS	TEAM	NO	FC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Roscoe Parrish	BUF	27	2	440	16.3	74t	1
Joshua Cribbs	CLE	30	10	405	13.5	76t	1
Wes Welker	NE	25	7	249	10.0	35	0
TED GINN JR.	MIA	24	15	230	9.6	87t	1
Darren Sproles	SD	24	2	229	9.5	45t	1
Jacoby Jones	HOU	30	7	286	9.5	74	0
Chris Davis	TEN	31	12	293	9.5	39	0
Dennis Northcutt	JAC	26	13	240	9.2	37	0
Eddie Drummond	KC	32	11	222	6.9	22	0
Allen Rossum	PIT	36	8	232	6.4	49	0

BOB LEVERONE / SN

TEAM SCORING

- *Points:* 589, New England (2007)

PASSING

- *Completions:* 440, Drew Brees, New Orleans (2007)
- *Touchdowns:* 50, Tom Brady, New England (2007)
- *Yards:* 5,084, Dan Marino, Miami (1984)
- *Longest TD:* 10 tied with 99 yards, most recent Jeff Garcia to Andre' Davis, Cleveland (2004)

SCORING, KICKERS

- *Points:* 176, Paul Hornung, Green Bay (1960)
- *Field Goals:* 40, Neil Rackers, Arizona (2005)
- *Extra Points:* 74, Stephen Gostkowski, New England (2007)

SCORING, NON-KICKERS

- *Touchdowns:* 31, LaDainian Tomlinson, San Diego (2006)

RUSHING

- *Carries:* 416, Larry Johnson, Kansas City (2006)
- *Yards:* 2,105, Eric Dickerson, L.A. Rams (1984)
- *Touchdowns:* 28, LaDainian Tomlinson, San Diego (2006)

RECEIVING

- *Receptions:* 143, Marvin Harrison, Indianapolis (2002)
- *Yards:* 1,848, Jerry Rice, San Francisco (1995)
- *Touchdowns:* 23, Randy Moss, New England (2007)

INTERCEPTIONS

- *Number:* 14, Dick "Night Train" Lane, L.A. Rams (1952)
- *Return Yards:* 358, Ed Reed, Baltimore Ravens (2004)

INTERCEPTIONS

2+ INTERCEPTIONS	TEAM	NO	YARDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Oshiomogho Atogwe	STL	8	125	15.6	52t	1
Marcus Trufant	SEA	7	150	21.4	84t	1
Anthony Henry	DAL	6	81	13.5	28t	1
Antrel Rolle	ARI	5	231	46.2	57	3
Roderick Hood	ARI	5	196	39.2	71t	2
Brian Urlacher	CHI	5	101	20.2	85t	1
Sean Taylor	WAS	5	98	19.6	48	0
Ken Hamlin	DAL	5	93	18.6	35	0
DeAngelo Hall	ATL	5	80	16.0	33	0
Atari Bigby	GB	5	50	10.0	22	0
Terence Newman	DAL	4	129	32.3	70	1
Lofa Tatupu	SEA	4	116	29.0	49	0
Dwight Smith	MIN	4	112	28.0	93t	1
Nate Clements	SF	4	74	18.5	62	0
Shawn Springs	WAS	4	63	15.8	53	0
Darren Sharper	MIN	4	61	15.3	41	1
Sam Madison	NYG	4	59	14.8	27	0
Fakhir Brown	STL	4	48	12.0	36t	1
Charles Woodson	GB	4	48	12.0	46t	1
Walt Harris	SF	4	42	10.5	23	0
Gibril Wilson	NYG	4	12	3.0	10	0

2+ INTERCEPTIONS	TEAM	NO	YARDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Jermaine Phillips	TB	4	2	0.5	2	0
Mike McKenzie	NO	3	161	53.7	75t	2
Richard Marshall	CAR	3	107	35.7	73	1
Keith Smith	DET	3	64	21.3	64t	1
Roman Harper	NO	3	58	19.3	31t	1
Karlos Dansby	ARI	3	55	18.3	28	0
Aaron Ross	NYG	3	51	17.0	43t	1
Chris Crocker	ATL	3	40	13.3	18	0
London Fletcher	WAS	3	36	12.0	27t	1
Deon Grant	SEA	3	34	11.3	34	0
Charles Tillman	CHI	3	24	8.0	20	0
Phillip Buchanon	TB	3	22	7.3	19	0
Jason David	NO	3	21	7.0	19	0
Deke Cooper	CAR	3	19	6.3	19	0
Sheldon Brown	PHI	3	3	1.0	3	0
Kevin Williams	MIN	2	72	36.0	54t	2
Gerald Alexander	DET	2	70	35.0	36	0
Kenoy Kennedy	DET	2	45	22.5	38	0
Nick Barnett	GB	2	40	20.0	38	0
Chad Greenway	MIN	2	39	19.5	37t	1
Aaron Rouse	GB	2	37	18.5	34	0

2+ INTERCEPTIONS	TEAM	NO	YARDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Danieal Manning	CHI	2	33	16.5	33	0
Ronde Barber	TB	2	32	16.0	29t	1
Tanard Jackson	TB	2	26	13.0	26	0
Travis Fisher	DET	2	25	12.5	13	0
Lito Sheppard	PHI	2	25	12.5	16	0
Lawyer Milloy	ATL	2	24	12.0	19	0
Jason Craft	NO	2	21	10.5	21	0
Adrian Wilson	ARI	2	20	10.0	20	0
Michael Lewis	SF	2	18	9.0	18	0
Al Harris	GB	2	17	8.5	17	0
Pisa Tinoisamoa	STL	2	15	7.5	15	0
Michael Boley	ATL	2	12	6.0	12	0
Ron Bartell	STL	2	10	5.0	9	0
Roy Williams	DAL	2	10	5.0	10	0
Barrett Ruud	TB	2	7	3.5	5	0
Josh Bullocks	NO	2	6	3.0	6	0
Brandon McGowan	CHI	2	5	2.5	5	0
Demorrio Williams	ATL	2	3	1.5	8	0
Julian Peterson	SEA	2	3	1.5	3	0
Ken Lucas	CAR	2	1	0.5	1	0
Brian Kelly	TB	2	0	0.0	0	0
Fernando Bryant	DET	2	0	0.0	0	0

RECORDS

→ *Longest TD Return:* 106, Ed Reed, Baltimore Ravens (2004)
→ *Touchdowns:* 3 tied with 4 touchdowns, most recent Eric Allen, Philadelphia (1993)

PUNTING

→ *Number:* 2 tied with 114 punts, most recent Chad Stanley, Houston (2002)
→ *Average:* 51.4, Sammy Baugh, Washington (1940)
→ *Longest:* 98, Steve O'Neal, N.Y. Jets (1969)

PUNT RETURNS

→ *Number:* 70, Danny Reece, Tampa Bay (1979)
→ *Yards:* 875, Desmond Howard, Green Bay (1996)
→ *Longest TD:* 103, Robert Bailey, L.A. Rams (1994)
→ *Touchdowns:* 3 tied with 4 touchdowns, most recent Devin Hester, Chicago (2007)

KICK RETURNS

→ *Number:* 82, MarTay Jenkins, Arizona (2000)
→ *Yards:* 2,186, MarTay Jenkins, Arizona (2000)
→ *Longest TD:* 108, Ellis Hobbs, New England (2007)
→ *Touchdowns:* 2 tied with 4 touchdowns, most recent Cecil Turner, Chicago (1970)

SACKS

→ *Number:* 22.5, Michael Strahan, N.Y. Giants (2001)

TOP TO BOTTOM: BOB LEVERONE, JAY DROWNS, ALBERT DICKSON / SN

KICK RETURNS

20+ RETURNS	TEAM	NO	YARDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Aundrae Allison	MIN	20	574	28.7	104t	1
Rock Cartwright	WAS	52	1339	25.8	80	0
Miles Austin	DAL	24	612	25.5	60	0
Derek Stanley	STL	20	509	25.5	49	0
Jerious Norwood	ATL	52	1317	25.3	76	0
Dante Hall	STL	29	729	25.1	84	0
Aveion Cason	DET	42	1041	24.8	74	0
Ahmad Bradshaw	NYG	38	921	24.2	68	0
Pierre Thomas	NO	36	865	24.0	64	0
Maurice Hicks	SF	63	1502	23.8	55	0
Koren Robinson	GB	25	596	23.8	67	0
Tyson Thompson	DAL	20	471	23.6	72	0
Brandon Williams	SF-STL	22	508	23.1	37	0
Ryne Robinson	CAR	26	598	23.0	60	0
Tramon Williams	GB	30	684	22.8	65	0
J.R. Reed	PHI	31	701	22.6	34	0
Steve Breaston	ARI	62	1391	22.4	59	0
Nate Burleson	SEA	27	590	21.9	91t	1
Reuben Droughns	NYG	20	437	21.9	34	0
Devin Hester	CHI	43	934	21.7	97t	2
Correll Buckhalter	PHI	37	798	21.6	35	0

PUNT RETURNS

21+ RETURNS	TEAM	NO	FC	YDS	AVG	LONG	TD
Devin Hester	CHI	42	6	651	15.5	89t	4
Nate Burleson	SEA	58	8	658	11.3	94t	1
Steve Breaston	ARI	42	6	395	9.4	73t	1
Patrick Crayton	DAL	22	20	201	9.1	49	0
Ryne Robinson	CAR	30	19	262	8.7	34	0
Charles Woodson	GB	33	5	268	8.1	34	0
Reno Mahe	PHI	31	11	249	8.0	32	0
Michael Lewis	SF	44	4	336	7.6	51	0
R.W. McQuarters	NYG	42	18	318	7.6	27	0
Adam Jennings	ATL	30	17	186	6.2	23	0
Antwaan Randle El	WAS	34	7	209	6.1	27	0

SACKS

4.0+ SACKS	TEAM	NO
Patrick Kerney	SEA	14.5
DeMarcus Ware	DAL	14.0
Osi Umenyiora	NYG	13.0
Greg Ellis	DAL	12.5
Trent Cole	PHI	12.5
Aaron Kampman	GB	12.0
Andre Carter	WAS	10.5
John Abraham	ATL	10.0
Justin Tuck	NYG	10.0
Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila	GB	9.5
Julian Peterson	SEA	9.5
Michael Strahan	NYG	9.0
Darnell Dockett	ARI	9.0
Adewale Ogunleye	CHI	9.0
Greg White	TB	8.0
Tommie Harris	CHI	8.0
Darryl Tapp	SEA	7.0
Will Witherspoon	STL	7.0
Shaun Rogers	DET	7.0
Corey Williams	GB	7.0
Will Smith	NO	7.0
Calvin Pace	ARI	6.5
Bryant Young	SF	6.5
Dewayne White	DET	6.5
Jared DeVries	DET	6.5
La'Roi Glover	STL	6.0
Gaines Adams	TB	6.0
Jovan Haye	TB	6.0
Fred Robbins	NYG	5.5
Antonio Smith	ARI	5.5
Marcus Washington	WAS	5.0
Brian Urlacher	CHI	5.0
Ben Leber	MIN	5.0
Ray Edwards	MIN	5.0
Juqua Thomas	PHI	5.0
Mark Anderson	CHI	5.0
Kenechi Udeze	MIN	5.0
Mathias Kiwanuka	NYG	4.5
Alex Brown	CHI	4.5
E.J. Henderson	MIN	4.5
Brian Robison	MIN	4.5
Gerald Hayes	ARI	4.0
Chris Wilson	WAS	4.0
Patrick Willis	SF	4.0
Mike Patterson	PHI	4.0
Roman Harper	NO	4.0

2007 SEASON RECAP

Eli Manning & Brandon Jacobs

AMERICAN FOOTBALL CONFERENCE

EAST DIVISION	W	L	T	PCT	PF	PA
New England	16	0	0	1.000	589	274
Buffalo	7	9	0	.438	252	354
New York Jets	4	12	0	.250	268	355
Miami	1	15	0	.063	267	437

NORTH DIVISION	W	L	T	PCT	PF	PA
Pittsburgh	10	6	0	.625	393	269
Cleveland	10	6	0	.625	402	382
Cincinnati	7	9	0	.438	380	385
Baltimore	5	11	0	.313	275	384

SOUTH DIVISION	W	L	T	PCT	PF	PA
Indianapolis	13	3	0	.813	450	262
Jacksonville*	11	5	0	.688	411	304
Tennessee*	10	6	0	.625	301	297
Houston	8	8	0	.500	379	384

WEST DIVISION	W	L	T	PCT	PF	PA
San Diego	11	5	0	.688	412	284
Denver	7	9	0	.438	320	409
Kansas City	4	12	0	.250	226	335
Oakland	4	12	0	.250	283	398

NATIONAL FOOTBALL CONFERENCE

EAST DIVISION	W	L	T	PCT	PF	PA
Dallas	13	3	0	.813	455	325
New York Giants*	10	6	0	.625	373	351
Washington*	9	7	0	.563	334	310
Philadelphia	8	8	0	.500	336	300

NORTH DIVISION	W	L	T	PCT	PF	PA
Green Bay	13	3	0	.813	435	291
Minnesota	8	8	0	.500	365	311
Detroit	7	9	0	.438	346	444
Chicago	7	9	0	.438	334	348

SOUTH DIVISION	W	L	T	PCT	PF	PA
Tampa Bay	9	7	0	.563	334	270
Carolina	7	9	0	.438	267	347
New Orleans	7	9	0	.438	379	388
Atlanta	4	12	0	.250	259	414

WEST DIVISION	W	L	T	PCT	PF	PA
Seattle	10	6	0	.625	393	291
Arizona	8	8	0	.500	404	399
San Francisco	5	11	0	.313	219	364
St. Louis	3	13	0	.188	263	438

** wild card*

WILD-CARD GAMES

JACKSONVILLE	31
Pittsburgh	29
Tennessee	6
SAN DIEGO	17
NEW YORK GIANTS	24
Tampa Bay	14
Washington	14
SEATTLE	35

DIVISIONAL PLAYOFFS

Jacksonville	20
NEW ENGLAND	31
SAN DIEGO	28
Indianapolis	24
NEW YORK GIANTS	21
Dallas	17
Seattle	20
GREEN BAY	42

AFC CHAMPIONSHIP

San Diego	12
NEW ENGLAND	21

NFC CHAMPIONSHIP

NEW YORK GIANTS	23
Green Bay	20

SUPER BOWL XLII

NEW YORK GIANTS 17

NEW ENGLAND 14

WILD-CARD GAMES

AFC > Jacksonville at Pittsburgh

TEAM STATS	JAC	PIT
Total net rushing	135	43
Total net passing	104	297
Total net yards	239	340
First downs	14	24
Sacked-yards lost	4-36	6-40
Third-down conversions	4-11	7-14
Fourth-down conversions	1-1	1-1
Time of possession	27:01	32:59

SCORING	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	FINAL
JAC	7	14	7	3	31
PIT	7	0	3	19	29

AFC > Tennessee at San Diego

TEAM STATS	TEN	SD
Total net rushing	119	68
Total net passing	129	282
Total net yards	248	350
First downs	15	17
Sacked-yards lost	3-9	1-10
Third-down conversions	9-16	8-15
Fourth-down conversions	0-0	1-1
Time of possession	27:41	32:19

SCORING	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	FINAL
TEN	3	3	0	0	6
SD	0	0	10	7	17

NFC > New York Giants at Tampa Bay

TEAM STATS	NYG	TB
Total net rushing	100	69
Total net passing	177	202
Total net yards	277	271
First downs	16	20
Sacked-yards lost	1-8	1-5
Third-down conversions	5-12	9-14
Fourth-down conversions	0-0	0-0
Time of possession	33:31	26:29

SCORING	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	FINAL
NYG	0	14	3	7	24
TB	7	0	0	7	14

NFC > Washington at Seattle

TEAM STATS	WAS	SEA
Total net rushing	75	77
Total net passing	244	227
Total net yards	319	304
First downs	21	14
Sacked-yards lost	3-22	1-2
Third-down conversions	4-18	2-11
Fourth-down conversions	1-3	0-0
Time of possession	34:15	25:45

SCORING	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	FINAL
WAS	0	0	0	14	14
SEA	7	3	3	22	35

DIVISIONAL PLAYOFFS

AFC > Jacksonville at New England

TEAM STATS	JAC	NE
Total net rushing	80	145
Total net passing	270	258
Total net yards	350	403
First downs	22	24
Sacked-yards lost	1-8	1-4
Third-down conversions	4-10	6-10
Fourth-down conversions	2-3	1-1
Time of possession	27:40	32:20

SCORING	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	FINAL
JAC	7	7	3	3	20
NE	7	7	14	3	31

AFC > San Diego at Indianapolis

TEAM STATS	SD	IND
Total net rushing	99	44
Total net passing	312	402
Total net yards	411	446
First downs	20	29
Sacked-yards lost	0-0	0-0
Third-down conversions	6-10	3-11
Fourth-down conversions	0-0	2-4
Time of possession	29:39	30:21

SCORING	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	FINAL
SD	0	7	14	7	28
IND	7	3	7	7	24

NFC > New York Giants at Dallas

TEAM STATS	NYG	DAL
Total net rushing	90	154
Total net passing	140	182
Total net yards	230	336
First downs	16	23
Sacked-yards lost	3-23	2-19
Third-down conversions	4-9	10-16
Fourth-down conversions	0-0	0-1
Time of possession	23:30	36:30

SCORING	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	FINAL
NYG	7	7	0	7	21
Dallas	0	14	3	0	17

NFC > Seattle at Green Bay

TEAM STATS	SEA	GB
Total net rushing	28	235
Total net passing	172	173
Total net yards	200	408
First downs	15	25
Sacked-yards lost	2-22	1-0
Third-down conversions	3-11	7-10
Fourth-down conversions	0-1	0-0
Time of possession	26:00	34:00

SCORING	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	FINAL
Seattle	14	3	3	0	20
Green Bay	14	14	7	7	42

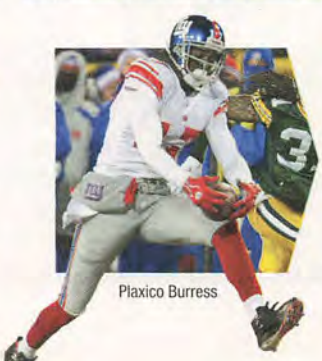
CONFERENCE CHAMPIONSHIP

Laurence Maroney

AFC > San Diego at New England

TEAM STATS	SD	NE
Total net rushing	104	149
Total net passing	207	198
Total net yards	311	347
First downs	17	25
Sacked-yards lost	1-4	2-11
Third-down conversions	3-12	7-13
Fourth-down conversions	0-0	0-0
Time of possession	26:40	33:20

SCORING	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	FINAL
SD	3	6	3	0	12
NE	0	14	0	7	21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NFC > New York Giants at Green Bay

TEAM STATS	NYG	GB
Total net rushing	134	28
Total net passing	243	236
Total net yards	377	264
First downs	24	13
Sacked-yards lost	2-8	0-0
Third-down conversions	6-16	1-10
Fourth-down conversions	0-1	0-0
Time of possession	40:01	22:34

SCORING	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	OT	FINAL
NYG	3	3	14	0	3	23
GB	0	10	7	3	0	20

CLOCKWISE: BOB LEVERONE / SN; ALBERT DICKSON / SN (2)

Super Bowls / Super Bowl MVP

1967	Green Bay 35, Kansas City 10	Bart Starr, Green Bay Packers
1968	Green Bay 33, Oakland 14	Bart Starr, Green Bay Packers
1969	N.Y. Jets 16, Baltimore Colts 7	Joe Namath, New York Jets
1970	Kansas City 23, Minnesota 7	Len Dawson, Kansas City Chiefs
1971	Baltimore Colts 16, Dallas 13	Chuck Howley, Dallas Cowboys
1972	Dallas 24, Miami 3	Roger Staubach, Dallas Cowboys
1973	Miami 14, Washington 7	Jake Scott, Miami Dolphins
1974	Miami 24, Minnesota 7	Larry Csonka, Miami Dolphins
1975	Pittsburgh 16, Minnesota 6	Franco Harris, Pittsburgh Steelers
1976	Pittsburgh 21, Dallas 17	Lynn Swann, Pittsburgh Steelers
1977	Oakland 32, Minnesota 14	Fred Biletnikoff, Oakland Raiders
1978	Dallas 27, Denver 10	Harvey Martin and Randy White, Dallas Cowboys
1979	Pittsburgh 35, Dallas 31	Terry Bradshaw, Pittsburgh Steelers
1980	Pittsburgh 31, L.A. Rams 19	Terry Bradshaw, Pittsburgh Steelers
1981	Oakland 27, Philadelphia 10	Jim Plunkett, Oakland Raiders
1982	San Francisco 26, Cincinnati 21	Joe Montana, San Francisco 49ers
1983	Washington 27, Miami 17	John Riggins, Washington Redskins
1984	L.A. Raiders 38, Washington 9	Marcus Allen, Los Angeles Raiders
1985	San Francisco 38, Miami 16	Joe Montana, San Francisco 49ers
1986	Chicago 46, New England 10	Richard Dent, Chicago Bears
1987	N.Y. Giants 39, Denver 20	Phil Simms, New York Giants
1988	Washington 42, Denver 10	Doug Williams, Washington Redskins
1989	San Francisco 20, Cincinnati 16	Jerry Rice, San Francisco 49ers
1990	San Francisco 55, Denver 10	Joe Montana, San Francisco 49ers
1991	N.Y. Giants 20, Buffalo 19	Ottis Anderson, New York Giants
1992	Washington 37, Buffalo 24	Mark Rypien, Washington Redskins
1993	Dallas 52, Buffalo 17	Troy Aikman, Dallas Cowboys
1994	Dallas 30, Buffalo 13	Emmitt Smith, Dallas Cowboys
1995	San Francisco 49, San Diego 26	Steve Young, San Francisco 49ers
1996	Dallas 27, Pittsburgh 17	Larry Brown, Dallas Cowboys
1997	Green Bay 35, New England 21	Desmond Howard, Green Bay Packers
1998	Denver 31, Green Bay 24	Terrell Davis, Denver Broncos
1999	Denver 34, Atlanta 19	John Elway, Denver Broncos
2000	St. Louis 23, Tennessee 16	Kurt Warner, St. Louis Rams
2001	Baltimore Ravens 34, N.Y. Giants 7	Ray Lewis, Baltimore Ravens
2002	New England 20, St. Louis 17	Tom Brady, New England Patriots
2003	Tampa Bay 48, Oakland 21	Dexter Jackson, Tampa Bay Buccaneers
2004	New England 32, Carolina 29	Tom Brady, New England Patriots
2005	New England 24, Philadelphia 21	Deion Branch, New England Patriots
2006	Pittsburgh 21, Seattle 10	Hines Ward, Pittsburgh Steelers
2007	Indianapolis 29, Chicago 17	Peyton Manning, Indianapolis Colts
2008	N.Y. Giants 17, New England 14	Eli Manning, New York Giants

NFL Awards

NFL MVP

PLAYER	TEAM	POINTS
Tom Brady	New England	49
Brett Favre	Green Bay	1

OFFENSIVE Player of the Year

	TEAM	POINTS
Tom Brady	New England	35.5
Randy Moss	New England	12.5
Brett Favre	Green Bay	1
Wes Welker	New England	1

DEFENSIVE Player of the Year

	TEAM	POINTS
Bob Sanders	Indianapolis	31
Albert Haynesworth	Tennessee	4
Patrick Kerney	Seattle	4
Antonio Cromartie	San Diego	3
Mike Vrabel	New England	2
DeMarcus Ware	Dallas	2
Ronde Barber	Tampa Bay	1
James Harrison	Pittsburgh	1
Mario Williams	Houston	1
Patrick Willis	San Francisco	1

OFFENSIVE Rookie of the Year

	TEAM	POINTS
Adrian Peterson	Minnesota	46.5
Joe Thomas	Cleveland	3.5

DEFENSIVE Rookie of the Year

	TEAM	POINTS
Patrick Willis	San Francisco	48
Jon Beason	Carolina	2

COMEBACK Player of the Year

	TEAM	POINTS
Greg Ellis	Dallas	12
Randy Moss	New England	10
Ben Roethlisberger	Pittsburgh	7
Brett Favre	Green Bay	5
Jamal Lewis	Cleveland	5
Bobby Engram	Seattle	3
Derek Anderson	Cleveland	2
Patrick Kerney	Seattle	2
Andre Carter	Washington	1
Albert Haynesworth	Tennessee	1
Amani Toomer	New York Giants	1
Mario Williams	Houston	1

COACH of the Year

	TEAM	POINTS
Bill Belichick	New England	29
Mike McCarthy	Green Bay	15
Jack Del Rio	Jacksonville	2
Wade Phillips	Dallas	2
Tony Dungy	Indianapolis	1
Jon Gruden	Tampa Bay	1

SUPER BOWL XLII MVP

	TEAM
Eli Manning	New York Giants

PRO BOWL MVP

	TEAM
Adrian Peterson	Minnesota

PAUL SPINELLI / GETTY IMAGES

SUPER BOWL XLII

AT UNIVERSITY OF PHOENIX STADIUM
GLENDALE, AZ, FEB. 3, 2008
Attendance: 71,101

SCORING	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	FINAL
New York Giants	3	0	0	14	17
New England	0	7	0	7	14

SCORING

	QTR	TIME	
NYG	1	5:01	Tynes 32-yard field goal
NE	2	14:57	Maroney 1-yard run (Gostkowski kick)
NYG	4	11:05	Tyree 5-yard pass from Manning (Tynes kick)
NE	4	2:42	Moss 6-yard pass from Brady (Gostkowski kick)
NYG	4	0:35	Burress 13-yard pass from Manning (Tynes kick)

TEAM STATISTICS

	New York Giants	New England
Total net rushing	91	45
Total net passing	247	229
Total net yards	338	274
First downs	17	22
Sacked-yards lost	3-8	5-37
Third-down conversions	8-16	7-14
Fourth-down conversions	1-1	0-2
Time of possession	26:00	34:00

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING:

New York Giants—Bradshaw 9-45, Jacobs 14-42, Manning 3-4

New England—Maroney 14-36-TD, Faulk 1-7, Evans 1-2

PASSING:

New York Giants—Manning 19-34-255-2 TD-1 INT

New England—Brady 29-48-266-1 TD

RECEIVING:

New York Giants—Toomer 6-84, Smith 5-50, Boss 1-45, Tyree 3-43-TD, Burress 2-27-TD, Bradshaw 1-3, Hedgecock 1-3

New England—Welker 11-103, Moss 5-62-TD, Faulk 7-52, Stallworth 3-34, Maroney 2-12, Brady 1-3

SACKS:

New York Giants—Tuck 2, Alford 1, Mitchell 1, Strahan 1

New England—Thomas 2, Green 1

PRO BOWL 2008 HAWAII

SCORING	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	FINAL
AFC	17	10	3	0	30
NFC	7	14	7	14	42

TEAM STATISTICS

	AFC	NFC
Total net rushing	45	169
Total net passing	281	289
Total net yards	326	458
First downs	24	28
Sacked-yards lost	2-11	1-4
Third-down conversions	4-12	5-9
Fourth-down conversions	2-3	3-3
Time of possession	27:44	32:16

INDIVIDUAL LEADERS

RUSHING:

AFC—Roethlisberger 1-18

NFC—Peterson 16-129-2 TD

PASSING:

AFC—Manning 11-16-147-1 TD

NFC—Garcia 8-10-117-1 TD-1 INT

RECEIVING:

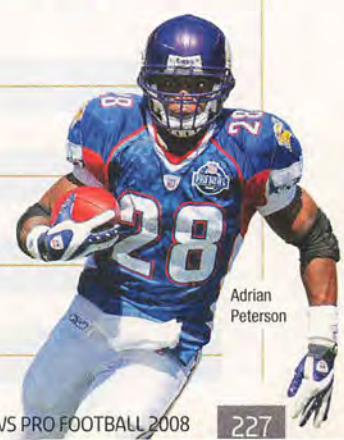
AFC—Gonzalez 4-79

NFC—Owens 8-101-2 TD

SACKS:

AFC—Vanden Bosch 1

NFC—Kampman 1, Umenyiora 1



Adrian Peterson

2008 NFL WEEKLY SCHEDULE

All times Eastern/Preseason game times subject to change

TELEVISED PRESEASON GAMES

Sunday, Aug. 3
Hall of Fame Game (Canton, Ohio)
Indianapolis vs. Washington — 8:00, NBC

Thursday, Aug. 7
New Orleans at Arizona — 8:00, ESPN

Monday, Aug. 11
Cincinnati at Green Bay — 8:00, ESPN

Thursday, Aug. 14
Carolina at Philadelphia — 8:00, FOX

Saturday, Aug. 16
Oakland at Tennessee — 8:00, FOX

Sunday, Aug. 17
New England at Tampa Bay — 8:00, NFL Network

Monday, Aug. 18
Cleveland at N.Y. Giants — 8:00, ESPN

Thursday, Aug. 21
San Francisco at Chicago — 8:00, FOX

Friday, Aug. 22
Houston at Dallas — 8:00, CBS

Saturday, Aug. 23
Pittsburgh at Minnesota — 8:00, CBS

Sunday, Aug. 24
Buffalo at Indianapolis — 8:00, NFL Network

Monday, Aug. 25
Seattle at San Diego — 8:00, ESPN

Thursday, Aug. 28
Jacksonville at Washington — 7:00, NBC

REGULAR SEASON GAMES

WEEK 1

Thursday, Sept. 4	
Washington at N.Y. Giants	7:00
Sunday, Sept. 7	
Cincinnati at Baltimore	1:00
N.Y. Jets at Miami	1:00
Kansas City at New England	1:00
Houston at Pittsburgh	1:00
Jacksonville at Tennessee	1:00
Detroit at Atlanta	1:00
Seattle at Buffalo	1:00
Tampa Bay at New Orleans	1:00
St. Louis at Philadelphia	1:00
Dallas at Cleveland	4:15
Carolina at San Diego	4:15
Arizona at San Francisco	4:15
Chicago at Indianapolis	8:15
Monday, Sept. 8	
Minnesota at Green Bay	7:00
Denver at Oakland	10:15

WEEK 2

Sunday, Sept. 14	
Tennessee at Cincinnati	1:00
Buffalo at Jacksonville	1:00
Oakland at Kansas City	1:00
Indianapolis at Minnesota	1:00
Chicago at Carolina	1:00
Green Bay at Detroit	1:00
N.Y. Giants at St. Louis	1:00
New Orleans at Washington	1:00
Atlanta at Tampa Bay	4:05
San Francisco at Seattle	4:05
New England at N.Y. Jets	4:15
San Diego at Denver	4:15
Miami at Arizona	4:15
Baltimore at Houston	4:15
Pittsburgh at Cleveland	8:15
Monday, Sept. 15	
Philadelphia at Dallas	8:30

WEEK 3

Sunday, Sept. 21	
Kansas City at Atlanta	1:00
Oakland at Buffalo	1:00
Cincinnati at N.Y. Giants	1:00
Miami at New England	1:00
Houston at Tennessee	1:00
Tampa Bay at Chicago	1:00
Arizona at Washington	1:00
Carolina at Minnesota	1:00
New Orleans at Denver	4:05
Detroit at San Francisco	4:05
St. Louis at Seattle	4:05
Jacksonville at Indianapolis	4:15
Pittsburgh at Philadelphia	4:15
Cleveland at Baltimore	4:15
Dallas at Green Bay	8:15
Monday, Sept. 22	
N.Y. Jets at San Diego	8:30

WEEK 4

(Open date: N.Y. Giants, Detroit, Miami, Seattle, New England, Indianapolis)

Sunday, Sept. 28	
Cleveland at Cincinnati	1:00
Houston at Jacksonville	1:00
Denver at Kansas City	1:00
Atlanta at Carolina	1:00
Arizona at N.Y. Jets	1:00
San Francisco at New Orleans	1:00
Green Bay at Tampa Bay	1:00
Minnesota at Tennessee	1:00
San Diego at Oakland	4:05
Buffalo at St. Louis	4:05
Washington at Dallas	4:15
Philadelphia at Chicago	8:15
Monday, Sept. 29	
Baltimore at Pittsburgh	8:30

WEEK 5

(Open date: St. Louis, N.Y. Jets, Cleveland, Oakland)

Sunday, Oct. 5	
Tennessee at Baltimore	1:00
Kansas City at Carolina	1:00
Indianapolis at Houston	1:00
San Diego at Miami	1:00
Chicago at Detroit	1:00
Atlanta at Green Bay	1:00
Seattle at N.Y. Giants	1:00
Washington at Philadelphia	1:00
Tampa Bay at Denver	4:05
Buffalo at Arizona	4:15
Cincinnati at Dallas	4:15
New England at San Francisco	4:15
Pittsburgh at Jacksonville	8:15
Monday, Oct. 6	
Minnesota at New Orleans	8:30

WEEK 6

(Open date: Buffalo, Pittsburgh, Tennessee, Kansas City)

Sunday, Oct. 12	
Miami at Houston	1:00
Baltimore at Indianapolis	1:00
Cincinnati at N.Y. Jets	1:00
Oakland at New Orleans	1:00
Chicago at Atlanta	1:00
Detroit at Minnesota	1:00
Carolina at Tampa Bay	1:00
St. Louis at Washington	1:00
Jacksonville at Denver	4:05
Green Bay at Seattle	4:15
Dallas at Arizona	4:15
Philadelphia at San Francisco	4:15
New England at San Diego	8:15
Monday, Oct. 13	
N.Y. Giants at Cleveland	8:30

WEEK 7

(Open date: Philadelphia, Atlanta, Arizona, Jacksonville)

Sunday, Oct. 19	
San Diego at Buffalo	1:00
Pittsburgh at Cincinnati	1:00
Tennessee at Kansas City	1:00
Baltimore at Miami	1:00
New Orleans at Carolina	1:00
Minnesota at Chicago	1:00
San Francisco at N.Y. Giants	1:00
Dallas at St. Louis	1:00
Detroit at Houston	4:05
Cleveland at Washington	4:15
Indianapolis at Green Bay	4:15
N.Y. Jets at Oakland	4:15
Seattle at Tampa Bay	8:15
Monday, Oct. 20	
Denver at New England	8:30

WEEK 8

(Open date: Chicago, Green Bay, Minnesota, Cincinnati, Houston, Denver)

Sunday, Oct. 26	
San Diego at New Orleans*	1:00
Oakland at Baltimore	1:00
Buffalo at Miami	1:00
Kansas City at N.Y. Jets	1:00
Arizona at Carolina	1:00
Tampa Bay at Dallas	1:00
Washington at Detroit	1:00
St. Louis at New England	1:00
Atlanta at Philadelphia	1:00
Cleveland at Jacksonville	4:05
N.Y. Giants at Pittsburgh	4:15
Seattle at San Francisco	4:15
Monday, Oct. 27	
Indianapolis at Tennessee	8:30

**in London*

WEEK 9

(Open date: Carolina, New Orleans, San Francisco, San Diego)

Sunday, Nov. 2	
N.Y. Jets at Buffalo	1:00
Jacksonville at Cincinnati	1:00
Baltimore at Cleveland	1:00
Houston at Minnesota	1:00
Detroit at Chicago	1:00
Tampa Bay at Kansas City	1:00
Arizona at St. Louis	1:00
Green Bay at Tennessee	1:00
Miami at Denver	4:05
Dallas at N.Y. Giants	4:15
Philadelphia at Seattle	4:15
Atlanta at Oakland	4:15
New England at Indianapolis	8:15
Monday, Nov. 3	
Pittsburgh at Washington	8:30

WEEK 10

(Open date: Dallas, Washington, Tampa Bay, Baltimore)

Thursday, Nov. 6	
Denver at Cleveland	8:15
Sunday, Nov. 9	
Tennessee at Chicago	1:00
Jacksonville at Detroit	1:00
Cincinnati at Houston	1:00
Buffalo at New England	1:00
New Orleans at Atlanta	1:00
Seattle at Miami	1:00
Green Bay at Minnesota	1:00
St. Louis at N.Y. Jets	1:00
Carolina at Oakland	4:05
Indianapolis at Pittsburgh	4:15
Kansas City at San Diego	4:15
N.Y. Giants at Philadelphia	8:15
Monday, Nov. 10	
San Francisco at Arizona	8:30

WEEK 11

Thursday, Nov. 13	
N.Y. Jets at New England	8:15
Sunday, Nov. 16	
Denver at Atlanta	1:00
Houston at Indianapolis	1:00
Tennessee at Jacksonville	1:00
Oakland at Miami	1:00
Baltimore at N.Y. Giants	1:00
Detroit at Carolina	1:00
Philadelphia at Cincinnati	1:00
Chicago at Green Bay	1:00
New Orleans at Kansas City	1:00
Minnesota at Tampa Bay	1:00
St. Louis at San Francisco	4:05
Arizona at Seattle	4:05
San Diego at Pittsburgh	4:15
Dallas at Washington	8:15

** Note: Sunday night game subject to change*

Monday, Nov. 17	
Cleveland at Buffalo	8:30

WEEK 12

Thursday, Nov. 20	
Cincinnati at Pittsburgh	8:15
Sunday, Nov. 23	
Houston at Cleveland	1:00
Buffalo at Kansas City	1:00
New England at Miami	1:00
N.Y. Jets at Tennessee	1:00
Carolina at Atlanta	1:00
Philadelphia at Baltimore	1:00
San Francisco at Dallas	1:00
Tampa Bay at Detroit	1:00
Minnesota at Jacksonville	1:00
Chicago at St. Louis	1:00
Oakland at Denver	4:05
N.Y. Giants at Arizona	4:15
Washington at Seattle	4:15
Indianapolis at San Diego	8:15

** Note: Sunday night game subject to change*

Monday, Nov. 24	
Green Bay at New Orleans	8:30

WEEK 13

Thursday, Nov. 27	
Tennessee at Detroit	12:30
Seattle at Dallas	4:15
Arizona at Philadelphia	8:15
Sunday, Nov. 30	
Indianapolis at Cleveland	1:00
Baltimore at Cincinnati	1:00
Denver at N.Y. Jets	1:00
Miami at St. Louis	1:00
San Francisco at Buffalo	1:00
Carolina at Green Bay	1:00
New Orleans at Tampa Bay	1:00
N.Y. Giants at Washington	1:00
Atlanta at San Diego	4:05
Pittsburgh at New England	4:15
Kansas City at Oakland	4:15
Chicago at Minnesota	8:15

** Note: Sunday night game subject to change*

Monday, Dec. 1	
Jacksonville at Houston	8:30

WEEK 14

Thursday, Dec. 4	
Oakland at San Diego	8:15
Sunday, Dec. 7	
Jacksonville at Chicago	1:00
Houston at Green Bay	1:00
Cincinnati at Indianapolis	1:00
Cleveland at Tennessee	1:00
Washington at Baltimore	1:00
Minnesota at Detroit	1:00
Philadelphia at N.Y. Giants	1:00
Atlanta at New Orleans	1:00
Miami at Buffalo▲	4:05
Kansas City at Denver	4:05
N.Y. Jets at San Francisco	4:05
Dallas at Pittsburgh	4:15
St. Louis at Arizona	4:15
New England at Seattle	8:15

** Note: Sunday night game subject to change*
▲ in Toronto

Monday, Dec. 8	
Tampa Bay at Carolina	8:30

WEEK 15

Thursday, Dec. 11	
New Orleans at Chicago	8:15
Sunday, Dec. 14	
Pittsburgh at Baltimore	1:00
Denver at Carolina	1:00
Tennessee at Houston	1:00
San Diego at Kansas City	1:00
Buffalo at N.Y. Jets	1:00
Tampa Bay at Atlanta	1:00
Washington at Cincinnati	1:00
Detroit at Indianapolis	1:00
Green Bay at Jacksonville	1:00
San Francisco at Miami	1:00
Seattle at St. Louis	1:00
Minnesota at Arizona	4:05
New England at Oakland	4:15
N.Y. Giants at Dallas	8:15

** Note: Sunday night game subject to change*

Monday, Dec. 15	
Cleveland at Philadelphia	8:30

WEEK 16

Thursday, Dec. 18	
Indianapolis at Jacksonville	8:15
Saturday, Dec. 20	
Baltimore at Dallas	8:15
Sunday, Dec. 21	
Cincinnati at Cleveland	1:00
Miami at Kansas City	1:00
Pittsburgh at Tennessee	1:00
Philadelphia at Washington	1:00
Arizona at New England	1:00
New Orleans at Detroit	1:00
Atlanta at Minnesota	1:00
Carolina at N.Y. Giants	1:00
San Francisco at St. Louis	1:00
N.Y. Jets at Seattle	4:05
Houston at Oakland	4:05
Buffalo at Denver	4:05
San Diego at Tampa Bay	8:15

** Note: Sunday night game subject to change*

Monday, Dec. 22	
Green Bay at Chicago	8:30

WEEK 17

Sunday, Dec. 28	
Cleveland at Pittsburgh	1:00
Tennessee at Indianapolis	1:00
New England at Buffalo	1:00
Jacksonville at Baltimore	1:00
Kansas City at Cincinnati	1:00
Miami at N.Y. Jets	1:00
Oakland at Tampa Bay	1:00
Dallas at Philadelphia	1:00
N.Y. Giants at Minnesota	1:00
Chicago at Houston	1:00
St. Louis at Atlanta	1:00
Detroit at Green Bay	1:00
Carolina at New Orleans	1:00
Denver at San Diego	4:15
Washington at San Francisco	4:15
Seattle at Arizona	4:15

**Note: One of the Sunday games will move to 8:15 p.m.*

POSTSEASON GAMES

Wild Card Games
Sat.-Sun., Jan. 3-4, 2009

Divisional Playoffs
Sat.-Sun., Jan. 10-11, 2009

Conference Championships
Sunday, Jan. 18, 2009

SUPER BOWL XLIII

SUPER BOWL XLIII
Raymond James Stadium, Tampa
Sunday, Feb. 1, 2009

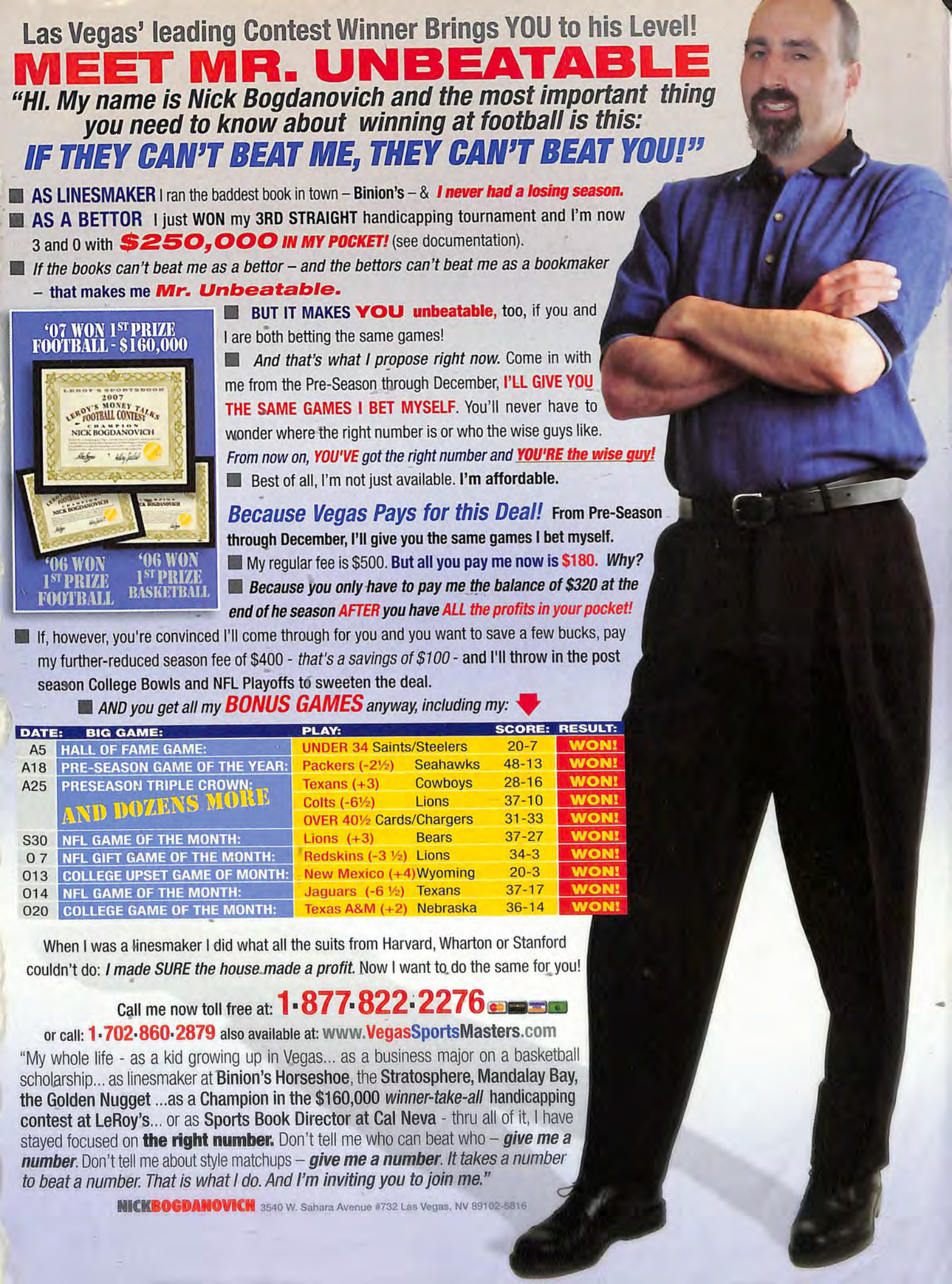
AFC-NFC Pro Bowl
Aloha Stadium, Honolulu
Sunday, Feb. 8, 2009

Las Vegas' leading Contest Winner Brings YOU to his Level!

MEET MR. UNBEATABLE

"HI. My name is Nick Bogdanovich and the most important thing you need to know about winning at football is this:

IF THEY CAN'T BEAT ME, THEY CAN'T BEAT YOU!"



- **AS LINESMAKER** I ran the baddest book in town – **Binion's** – & ***I never had a losing season.***
- **AS A BETTOR** I just **WON** my **3RD STRAIGHT** handicapping tournament and I'm now 3 and 0 with ***$250,000 IN MY POCKET!*** (see documentation).
- *If the books can't beat me as a bettor – and the bettors can't beat me as a bookmaker* – **that makes me *Mr. Unbeatable.***

- **BUT IT MAKES YOU unbeatable,** too, if you and I are both betting the same games!
- *And that's what I propose right now.* Come in with me from the Pre-Season through December, **I'LL GIVE YOU THE SAME GAMES I BET MYSELF**. You'll never have to wonder where the right number is or who the wise guys like. *From now on, **YOU'VE** got the right number and **YOU'RE the wise guy!***
- Best of all, I'm not just available. **I'm affordable.**

Because Vegas Pays for this Deal! **From Pre-Season through December, I'll give you the same games I bet myself.**

- My regular fee is $500. **But all you pay me now is $180.** ***Why?***
- ***Because you only have to pay me the balance of $320 at the end of he season AFTER you have ALL the profits in your pocket!***
- If, however, you're convinced I'll come through for you and you want to save a few bucks, pay my further-reduced season fee of $400 - *that's a savings of $100* - and I'll throw in the post season College Bowls and NFL Playoffs to sweeten the deal.
- *AND you get all my **BONUS GAMES** anyway, including my:*

DATE:	BIG GAME:	PLAY:		SCORE:	RESULT:
A5	HALL OF FAME GAME:	UNDER 34 Saints/Steelers		20-7	WON!
A18	PRE-SEASON GAME OF THE YEAR:	Packers (-2½)	Seahawks	48-13	WON!
A25	PRESEASON TRIPLE CROWN:	Texans (+3)	Cowboys	28-16	WON!
	AND DOZENS MORE	Colts (-6½)	Lions	37-10	WON!
		OVER 40½ Cards/Chargers		31-33	WON!
S30	NFL GAME OF THE MONTH:	Lions (+3)	Bears	37-27	WON!
O 7	NFL GIFT GAME OF THE MONTH:	Redskins (-3 ½)	Lions	34-3	WON!
O13	COLLEGE UPSET GAME OF MONTH:	New Mexico (+4)	Wyoming	20-3	WON!
O14	NFL GAME OF THE MONTH:	Jaguars (-6 ½)	Texans	37-17	WON!
O20	COLLEGE GAME OF THE MONTH:	Texas A&M (+2)	Nebraska	36-14	WON!

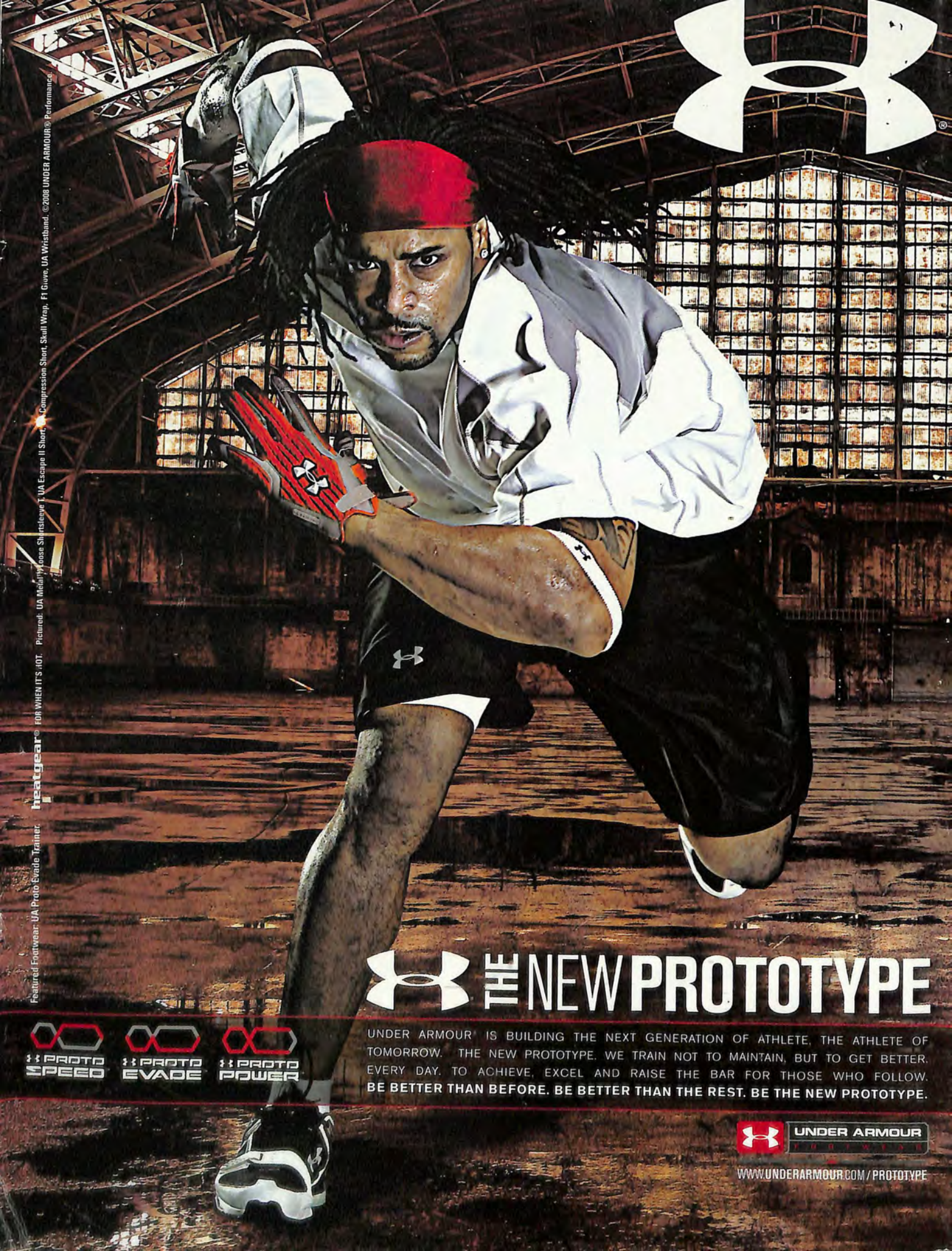
When I was a linesmaker I did what all the suits from Harvard, Wharton or Stanford couldn't do: *I made SURE the house made a profit.* Now I want to do the same for you!

Call me now toll free at: **1·877·822·2276**

or call: **1·702·860·2879** also available at: **www.VegasSportsMasters.com**

"My whole life - as a kid growing up in Vegas... as a business major on a basketball scholarship... as linesmaker at **Binion's Horseshoe**, the **Stratosphere, Mandalay Bay, the Golden Nugget** ...as a **Champion in the $160,000** *winner-take-all* **handicapping contest at LeRoy's**... or as **Sports Book Director at Cal Neva** - thru all of it, I have stayed focused on **the right number.** Don't tell me who can beat who – ***give me a number***. Don't tell me about style matchups – ***give me a number***. *It takes a number to beat a number. That is what I do. And I'm inviting you to join me."*

NICKBOGDANOVICH 3540 W. Sahara Avenue #732 Las Vegas, NV 89102-5816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